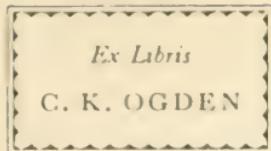


# SHADOW & SUNLIGHT

E. L. GRANT WATSON



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# SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT



# SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

A ROMANCE OF THE TROPICS

By E. L. GRANT WATSON

*Author of "Where Bonds are Loosed," and "The Mainland"*



JONATHAN CAPE  
ELEVEN GOWER STREET, LONDON



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To

KATHARINE GRANT WATSON



*If the red slayer think he slays,  
Or if the slain think he is slain,  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep, and pass, and turn again.*

*Fay or forgot to me is near ;  
Shadow and sunlight are the same ;  
The vanish'd gods to me appear ;  
And one to me are shame and fame.*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE VOICES OF MATANA

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A VERY faint breeze was beginning to stir over the lagoon. The sails of the cutter gave an indolent flap, then were still. James Blunt stood up in the stern of his boat and looked across the shining and placid water which lay between him and the land. There was a faint mist over the sea, lightly blurring the line of the shore, which swept round to the right in a crescent whose outer point faded into the mauve distance of sea and sky. Behind the white line of the surf and the yellow sands, he could see the deep, luxuriant cocoa-nut groves of Matana. And, now and then, as the boat drifted, he could catch a glimpse of the wooden walls of his house amongst the dark green of the surrounding scrub. To his left the line of yellow and white was broken by black thickets of mangrove which guarded the mouth of the river. By shading his eyes against the sun, he could see the sluggish flow of river-water as it met the sea, and, far from the shore and fuliginous mud, the

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silver and gold ripples which met and swallowed up the black water. Across the intense ebony of the mud and the mangrove swamp, the delicate spiral of a native fish-fence caught the light of the setting sun, shining like a golden thread stretched on velvet.

Another puff filled the sail. Blunt spoke in native dialect to a tall, gaunt savage who crouched by the mast. "It is coming; there will soon be enough breeze to carry us in."

Illagaroo nodded, then turned and spoke in an undertone to another native who kneeled by the bowsprit, gazing down placidly into the calm water. "It will be dark before we touch the shore. The sun is already sinking."

The three men were silent. Blunt from time to time moved the rudder, trying to feel the wind, which came now in more regular puffs. Illagaroo moved uneasily and spoke again.

"The voices will be very loud to-night."

Blunt sucked at his pipe for some seconds before he questioned: "Why do you think that?"

They are always loud after a calm; it makes them angry. It is on such a night that the spirits show themselves."

"You wish you were back safe in the village, eh?"

Illagaroo nodded.

"I have been at Matana eight seasons, and have never seen them. Why is that?"

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## VOICES OF MATANA

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" You are a friend of our people," replied Illagaroo, " but if you had seen them you would surely be dead. All those who have seen them die soon afterwards."

" Even white men ? "

" Even white men. The three brothers who were here before you," the natives seldom spoke of the Davidsons by their name, " they each saw them before they died."

" And how did they meet their deaths ? " Blunt queried.

" You have heard the story ; why do you ask ? "

" Yes, I have heard the story, but now, while the breeze is blowing so lightly, tell me again."

Illagaroo frowned, then spoke loud as if angry : " The first to die was lost in his boat in a hurricane. The second, who thought to get more copra if he brought foreign Malay men to work here, was killed by a chief of that people whom he struck with his roye. And the third——" Illagaroo paused.

" Yes, and the third ? "

" The third was no friend of the people."

Blunt laughed. " Illagaroo, you are an old scoundrel. I know it was you, you and another that killed him. But as your saying is : Here in Koro-bello each man carries his own life."

Illagaroo turned to the silent figure in the bows.

" Ah, now at last the wind is coming," said Blunt as the sails filled.

The ripples began to talk round the prow as the

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cutter headed toward the distant mooring-buoy, which looked like a shell floating on the dark water.

"What are these creatures like when you see them, Illagaroo?"

The savage again moved uneasily and turned to his companion. "Will you tell the master what they are like, Pinjaroo?"

Pinjaroo spoke in a soft, rich voice from behind the sail.

"They are like the corpses of men who have long been dead, so that the flesh hangs green and stinking from their bones; they move head-downwards among the tree-tops."

Illagaroo stood up, supporting himself by the mast-stays. "Ah, it is bad to speak of them when the sun is down; the darkness comes swiftly."

When they had landed and Blunt set his foot on the path which led through the plantation to the house, the two natives hesitated; they looked at each other uneasily, then Illagaroo said simply: "We will go round by the coast, and where the swamp begins we can swim a little way out to sea, and so reach the village."

Blunt nodded; he well knew the native fear of the plantation. "Look out for the sharks," he said sardonically.

"We have no fear of sharks," said Pinjaroo; "but listen, the voices are already coming. We will hasten." And they ran towards the beach.

The white man paused listening. In front of

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## VOICES OF MATANA

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him was the dark grove haunted by the evil spirits of Matana ; at his back the long line of the surf and the shark-infested lagoon. He was hungry and his eyes were sore with the glare of the sunshine off the sea. The dim light of late twilight was a relief ; but he was troubled—not at the voices, for of them he had no fear. His trouble was that he was a stranger in a foreign land. If he could fear those stupid, gibbering spirits, then he would be like the natives, more akin to this people he lived among ; but, in spite of everything, he was still a white man. Yet every month he was less of a white man. He understood the natives, had an imaginative sympathy for them, chose to live among them. Long ago he had argued it out with himself ; this was the life he was most happy to live. He deliberately had moved to the wildest part of the coast. He had lived where other men had been killed ; but how lonely he was sometimes. Was there no remedy for that loneliness ? He could not change his colour, and, so long as his body remained, that longing and that inexpressible desire would follow him.

He stood listening. Yes, the voices were already moving. He heard them at the far end of the plantation. They were approaching. As they came nearer, he could distinguish two discordant and separate cries. The one was complaining and terrified, the other raucous and fierce. Between them was all the hatred and rage of persecution. They

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seemed suddenly to scent his presence, and came racing through the tree-tops. He thought they were coming straight overhead, but they swerved to the right, then halted twenty yards distant and howled with rage at one another. The obscene cacophony filled Blunt with irritation. He walked towards the spot and peered up among the trees. There was silence. Then, from the very spot he had quitted, he heard the voices railing. He walked sullenly back to the path remembering that he was hungry and that his eyes still ached from the glare off the water. The voices followed to the edge of the plantation ; then, when he was out in the open, he heard them sweep back through the tree tops towards the beach.

The path led past the new mission-house that Matherson, the missionary from Nathamaki, had just built. He passed it with a feeling of aversion ; not that he disliked Matherson ; on the contrary he knew him to be a good fellow and a brave man, but in some way this building symbolised part of the discordance of his soul. A few steps further and he passed near one of the native camps. He could see black bodies crouched near the fires. At a little distance, hidden by the high jungle-grass, two natives were whirling bull-roarers, whose mystical cadence rose and fell, irregular as the wind.

When Blunt was close to his house, a young native woman slipped out of the bushes and stood near him. It was Uloto, the last of the native girls that

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he had taken to live in the house. She looked attractive and very young, as she stood confronting him in the red silk surong that he had given her, with the white shell necklace round her neck and the heavy red hibiscus flowers in her hair.

"I have been waiting for you," she whispered.

"Ah, little jungle-bird," he said. "See, I have brought you a present from Tomanta."

He opened a small haversack he was carrying, and gave her a parcel. "Do not open it here; some of them may roll out and get lost. Wait till we have light in the house."

The girl eagerly took the parcel into her long, soft, brown hands, then feeling the beads under the paper, she clutched him in an ecstasy of pleasure. "I do not want to go in now; the white medicine-man is there; he came this afternoon and has been waiting. That is why I stayed for you out here."

Blunt laughed; it always amused him that the natives should call Matherson the white medicine-man.

"Oh, is he. What has he been doing?"

"He went down to the new house. Tried to make white-man corroboree. Not much good."

Blunt chuckled again; it somehow pleased him to find how far the natives were from understanding any of Matherson's efforts. He put his hand on the girl's shoulder. "Now, little jungle-bird, run in and join Tula Ebu. She is in the house; tell her

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to bring supper for me and Matherson. Plenty quick, I am hungry, sec."

The girl put her arms up round his neck and kissed him, as he had taught her, on the mouth. Then she was gone like a black shadow. How simple it was with these native girls, Blunt thought. They are like jungle flowers, and last very little longer. One buys them from their fathers ; gives them just what he likes. They are easily made happy. In a year or eighteen months they lose their girlish charm, and turn into middle-aged native women. But they still have their uses ; they make excellent cooks, as did Ebu. But he had learnt one must not have too many of them in the house at the same time.

In the sitting-room he found Matherson. The two white men were very different in appearance, though they both wore the usual white cotton tunic of the tropics. Matherson was small, thin and dark. His black beard came to a point, and his black eyes were bright and restless as if ever seeking for new obstacles to overcome. There was vigour and enthusiasm in all his movements. Blunt was no less vigorous though his manner was slow. He was tall, fair-haired, and fair-bearded. His look was open and direct, but yet he did not appear as altogether designed to be well at ease with the world and with himself. In his blue eyes could be seen a loneliness and a lurking dissatisfaction. The two men exchanged greetings. Blunt said that he had given

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orders to his women to bring in supper as soon as it was ready. Of course Matherson would stay the night.

When they had finished the meal, they pulled chairs out on to the verandah.

"I wish you had been here this afternoon," began Matherson. "Had I known you were going to be away, I would have waited a day and come over to-morrow."

"I had a full load of copra ready, so I took it across to Tomanta," said Blunt.

"Yes, I know you don't go more than you are obliged, that is why I counted on finding you." He paused for a moment, then added: "I held a service at the new mission-house this afternoon."

Blunt nodded.

"It is very difficult to make any headway against the ignorant, and I might say hostile, spirit of these natives. In all my experience of the tribes of Koro-bello I have met none more unsympathetic than these here at Matana."

"They are a truly wild people."

"I wish you had been here. I was going to ask you to co-operate a little to help awaken their interest."

Blunt was silent.

"You know very well," continued the missionary, "that of all the people on the coast you have more influence than any other. A word or two from you, and an example, would make all the difference."

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Blunt looked at his companion. "And why do you suppose that I get on with them so well?"

"You have their sympathy; you have lived here a long time."

"It is for the same reason that you and I get on well together." The planter's slow, soft speech seemed well adapted to parry the missionary's attack. "We leave each other alone. I appreciate them for what they are. I never interfere."

Matherson shifted in his chair. "That perhaps is very well for superficial intercourse," he said with embarrassment, "but, however much we try to disguise it, we all have a duty towards our fellow-men."

"Of that I am not sure," said Blunt, and he took his pipe from his mouth, "though I admit you may be right. The point interests me." He looked hard at Matherson, and smiled. "Between friends perhaps there is a duty. It is strange that we have known each other for more than a year now, on and off, and yet we have never talked of these things, though I have known pretty well what you have been thinking of me."

Matherson waited; he did not speak.

Blunt laughed and continued. "If I tell you a little of my life, you will see how it is I do not wish to help you over your mission. The question will then be settled once and for all."

Matherson's questioning and intelligent eyes were

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## VOICES OF MATANA

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watching Blunt's face ; he had never before seen the planter come so far out of his shell.

" When I was thirty-five, for reasons of my own that I need not go into, I became sick of life in civilised countries. I came out to the tropics, came to Toman-ta, bought a small banana plantation. I lived there with a half-caste woman for a year. I suppose it was vaguely seeking for something that I had wanted all my life, but I didn't find it. I wanted, for one thing, to get further away from civilisation, deeper into the wilds, and to feel the spirit of the tropics as it lives in the wild natives. By chance I heard of this place. You know it is remote enough. The last of the Davidson brothers had just been murdered, and the place was for sale. Its reputation, that no white man could live here for more than a year, rather pleased me. Well, it was going cheap, and I bought it."

Blunt sucked at his pipe, found it had gone out, and re-lit it. Matherson waited in silence.

" I've lived here eight years. I have been at peace with the natives, they even protect me when inland tribes raid the coast, and here I have been happy. I have found something of what I wanted, and should be heart-broken if I had to leave this place. I like the wide sweep of the bay, the river, the mangrove swamp, the native village, and the natives themselves. They know that I have no fear of them, and I like them because I know that they know that." Blunt paused, listening to the

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wind, which sent the great leaves of the palms in the distant plantation brustling against one another.

"When I heard that you were coming to Nathamaki, two years ago, I was sorry. I had long ceased to be a Christian, and I didn't want my natives christianised. I had got to understand something of their religion. There is a wonder and a wildness, a magic which is both simple and extraordinarily deep-meaning. It satisfied me ; and, though Nathamaki is fifteen miles away, it seemed too near for the habitation of another white man. I felt all this, and you must have known I was hostile to you."

The missionary nodded.

"But when I found what sort of man you were, I was glad, and am glad now, though you know how I opposed the building of the mission-house." Blunt now spoke with an added earnestness, with a note of entreaty in his voice. "Matana would be changed for me if the natives were different. There is more in me of pagan than there is of Christian ; I could never help you to convert them. There are plenty of other natives on this coast. Let me buy the mission-house from you ; I can find use for it as a copra-store."

Matherson remained silent, looking out into the darkness.

Then he said simply, "I am a servant of God—I must do as He bids me." He added after a pause :

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"What you have just said makes my task very difficult."

The silence of the night again closed over them.

"I take it as a sign of your friendship that you have been frank with me," Matherson said at last. "And I will not ask your help where you feel so strongly opposed to my mission. But as a friend may I question you about what you have just told me?"

Blunt nodded and puffed at his pipe. He was unexpectedly moved by this affirmation of his position. "You said that you had found satisfaction in this pagan solitude. Do you mean by that—peace and happiness?"

"Is that to be found anywhere on this earth?"

"Yes."

"Where then?"

"If I were to tell you, you would not believe me."

"That is very true," and Blunt laughed, "so I will not trouble you." There was sudden hostility in his voice.

Again they sat in silence, which was again broken by Matherson. "I feel that you have reproached me to-night. You said that we got on well together because we left each other alone, did not interfere. It is a poor friendship that stands on such ceremony."

Blunt's hostility vanished; he felt warmly toward the little man. He wanted to help him over his embarrassment, but did not speak.

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"As a servant of God I ought long ago to have reproached you for the sin of fornication, for the state of sin in which you live." Matherson paused, a little shocked at the crudity of his own words.

"What would you have?" said Blunt laconically.

"I know it is the custom among the petty traders, but it is an abominable custom, which lowers the white man in his own respect and in the respect of the natives. It is more often than not the cause of murder."

"That is because the men do not pay for their wives," said Blunt with quiet mockery. "I have lived here at peace for eight years. I have had no need to kill, even in self-defence. Are there any others on the coast who could say as much? On the contrary, I have helped add to the population. Though it is doubtful," he added, "whether it is more unkind to kill or to beget a man."

Matherson was angry, both at his mockery and at his bitterness.

"Do you feel no responsibility," he asked, "towards your children, the children of a white man brought up in a native camp?"

Blunt frowned and shrugged his shoulders, "No, none."

"That is impossible. A man of your culture and perception must feel that he is responsible for his acts."

"Have you found so much responsibility and order in life? There is none. Isn't it enough to

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live, and be able to meet death without making a fuss? Why cant about responsibility? Imagine for a moment that all the fairy tales you believe in were false, as they are to me. Where would you find responsibility? I came here to escape this talk, why do you follow me with it?"

" You can never escape from that question," said Matherson gently. " I live by my belief in the responsibility of man towards men. For long I have thought over the difficulty of your position. I cannot help hoping and praying for your welfare."

" My position is self-chosen."

" Do you believe that?"

" No, that I cannot tell," said Blunt simply.

" I have often thought how much better it would be for you if you had a wife."

" A wife, what sort of a wife?"

" A white woman of course."

" Here in Matana?" Blunt was incredulous.

" Yes."

" Where in God's name is she to come from?"

" That question would probably not be so difficult to answer as you imagine."

" What do you mean?"

" I mean," said Matherson, leaning forward and speaking earnestly, " that I believe God has a special care and love for each one of us. We are His children. He will give to each according to his need."

Blunt could never answer Matherson when he talked like that. After a moment he said, smiling,

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"Just now you were reproaching me for having too *many* wives."

"You know very well I meant a white wife."

"Yes, but where is she to come from?"

"First question yourself as to your true desire. You had told me you are neither satisfied nor happy."

"That will take time. But tell me, where is she to come from? What is your plan? For I guess very well that you have one. Is it some store-keeper's daughter at Tomanta?"

"No, I know very well that a woman of that type would be no good. You must marry a woman from home." Matherson was very serious over his project, but he smiled at what might seem the grotesqueness of his plan. "This is what I suggest. I know you will laugh at me, but think it over." Blunt waited, his interest aroused. He was immensely amused at Matherson, but also touched at his solicitude. He watched the little man struggling with his embarrassment. He thought Matherson seemed at his best when he was embarrassed.

"Where is your native village or town in England?"

"I come from Blandford, a town in Dorset."

"Could you not write to your friends there, your mother or a sister, tell them, if they do not already know, the conditions of your life here, and say you wanted a housekeeper?"

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"A housekeeper on Korobello?" said Blunt with quiet humour.

"I know it is easy to laugh at the idea," said Matherson. "Of course any woman who accepted the post would know that she would ultimately become your wife."

"Would any woman be mad enough to come?"

"No, it would not be *any* woman who would answer that call; but God would speak to the heart of the right woman, and she would come."

Blunt was silent for several seconds. "There are very few white men who can live isolated in the tropics, Matherson, and remain sane. I doubt whether you are one." Then, after a further pause, "Sometimes I doubt whether any of us remain quite sane. The change that goes on within us is so subtle, so deep. It is as if the spirit of this *other* life were soaked up into every fibre. It changes us so deeply. At first we don't know what we are in for; I doubt if we ever know."

"You feel like that because you are drifting, because you have lost your faith."

"Ah, if it were as simple as that! For you perhaps it is simple. You have put your imagination in a box, and have it under lock and key. Has it ever entered your head that man might *create* his own faith?" They listened for some moments to the night noises that came, wafted from the beach and the plantation: the thud of the surf on the sand, and the stirring of the giant palm-leaves one against

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another. "These natives seem to me," Blunt continued, "to be doing, in their primitive way, something of that sort. They look at nature, see its terrors, its beauty, its cruelty, and create as reflections their spirits both beautiful and terrible. That is why they attract me."

Matherson could perceive Blunt's sincerity, and understood something of what he meant. "Does their paganism and idolatry satisfy you?" he asked.

"I have found no creed or religion that satisfies me."

Blunt saw that the missionary was about to speak in the ardour of his own conviction. "No, Matherson, let us remain friends, but we must go our own way. And as for a housekeeper," he added, smiling, "I don't think she'll do."

"You must think about the scheme. Do not condemn it till you have thought about it."

"Very well, I will think about it; but now we have sat very late, and I had almost forgotten that there is a little girl in there who will want to look at some beads I've brought her. She won't go to sleep till she's seen them," said Blunt whimsically. He could not resist teasing his friend. Matherson did not answer. "You know your room," Blunt continued, "or perhaps you would rather sit here a little longer? By your side you will find more lime juice, and here is the whisky."

"Thank you, I will sit here a little longer."

For an hour Matherson sat gazing out into the

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## VOICES OF MATANA

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darkness. He was praying both for the integrity of his own soul, for the other white man and for the pagan savages who would not hear the words of grace.

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## CHAPTER II

### ISLANDS OF NAKI

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THE missionary had left for Nathamaki three weeks ago. Since then Blunt had been alone with his natives. The trade-winds fanned the coast ; it was the best time of the year ; and yet Blunt was restless. The cleft in the foot-hills, in which Matana stood, was shut in by high rocks to the landward, and in front of the house lay the deep far-stretching plantations. As never before, the very spirit of the tropics seemed centred in that cleft in the hills. This year the rains had been even heavier than usual, the swamps extended further. Black-leaved lilies grew close up to the house. The wide surfaces of banana-leaves made groves of black shade. Each day Blunt would walk down through the thick jungle-grass, that stood ten feet high, and on through the plantation to the beach. Here there was air, the wide sweep of the coast, the lagoon, and beyond the reef, the sea. There was work to do. Now was the best time for drying the copra. But sometimes Blunt would

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## ISLANDS OF NAKI

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pause, wondering why he worked. Why did he work? Not for money. Three years ago he had made enough money to retire, to return to Europe and live in affluence. He was a rich man if he wished. No, he worked out of habit, as an excuse that he might continue to live at Matana.

He was returning to his house after a long day in a more remote plantation. It was evening. He paused by the native village, stayed a few minutes to talk with some of the men, then continued his way towards the house. While he walked up the slope, a mood of despondency came over him. The little seed, which for years had been lying hidden in his heart, had put out a shoot which was hard like a thorn or hook, and which now twitched and pulled at his inmost being, making him bleed. What did he want? Could it be put into words? Did he after all want a wife, and children who should grow up and inherit his wealth? No, he had chosen his way of life; he had turned his back upon all that. Matherson was mad, mad with religion and loneliness. Whoever but a madman would think of a housekeeper at Matana? The very word was ridiculous in that association.

He thought of the native women waiting him in his house. He had made a mistake, he never should have taken them within doors. He should have gone to them in the jungle. In the house they lost their wild beauty, and became merely sluttish. He should never have taken them from

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their forest jungle. Matherson was right, he had made a degrading compromise, in following a vulgar custom. He was neither white man nor black, but a hybrid fashioned by the tropics ; he was an outcast from both races. Well, he felt too depressed to make any alteration now. Alteration would mean fuss, it would be difficult to break a habit. For a moment he hated Matana and the wide leaves which glistened as they stood motionless. No, he loved Matana. He had lived where no other white man could live ; the wild coast of Korobello was his home. He needed a change, that was all.

He turned and went back to the village, stopped at the entrance of a hut and called "Pinjaroo."

A fat, heavy-looking native appeared in the doorway. His broad face presented an appearance of power and subtlety, his hair was very short, his body muscular, and his left shoulder was swollen with elephantiasis. He looked at Blunt without speaking.

"I am going away till to-morrow evening, see that the work is carried on as usual."

"Do you go to Tomanta or Nathamaki ? "

It annoyed Blunt to be questioned where he was going, also to have it at once supposed that he was visiting white men. "To neither ; I shall go shooting among the islands. I shall take one of the canoes from the estuary."

The native's face remained without expression. He did not speak for some seconds, then said, "The work will continue as usual."

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## ISLANDS OF NAKI

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With a quick glance Blunt tried to pierce the mask of Pinjaroo's face ; he was baffled, as baffled as if he had tried to read the secret of the jungle itself. He nodded and turned away. "Yes, there is no doubt that's an ugly customer," he thought to himself as he walked towards the estuary. "More dangerous than half-a-dozen Illagarroos." He felt that he was attracted towards the man because in him he sensed a certain quality of unknown dangerousness and power. For the same reason he had made him a foreman on the plantation.

Blunt stopped at one of the copra-huts, unlocked it, and took out his gun. When he reached the landing-stage near the estuary, it was dark. He stepped into one of the canoes, picked up the broad paddle, untied the bark rope and pushed out into the stream of the river. For a while he let the current take him, dipping the paddle silently to direct his course. The water was ebony black, and overhead the trees had grown together forming a tunnel, enclosing the river. Now and then trailing creepers swept against his face. At the river's mouth he made a few powerful strokes, which shot the canoe past the mud-banks, leaving the mangroves black and threatening upon either side. Wavelets slapped against the bark sides, the water changed from ebony to dark grey, and the canoe slid forward into the sea of the lagoon.

Blunt turned the boat northward. For two hours he worked steadily without a rest. A waning moon

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rose over the sea. He dropped the paddle and watched the silver and black that so softly caressed the land and flitted changefully over the water. This was what he had needed ; here in the cool of night, and alone, he could drink in the deep, so often evasive, and entrancing beauty of the tropics. Once more he was himself, free and separate ; he felt now no loneliness, only a boyish exultation. He started to paddle again, but now more slowly, taking frequent rests. Before the first light came, he was among the islands. He waited. Lying back with his hands behind his head, he let the canoe drift.

As the light came and the sun rose, the islands changed from black to grey, from grey to mauve, and finally to green, yellow and blue. There were hundreds of islands ; some mere rocks standing up solitary in the sea ; some were barren banks of coral sand ; some supported a single bush or tree, while others presented long banks of verdure and high rocks. A flock of grey-pink herons flew close to the boat and alighted on a sand-bank. Blunt watched the almost horizontal rays give an additional rose-tint to their feathers. The water was clear and transparent ; in most places it was very shallow, though there were deeper clefts and pools. About three feet from the surface he could see white coral-rock spotted and incrusted with the brilliant and variegated forms of sea-urchin and bêche-de-mer. In the pools were fern corals and sponge-

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corals, and among them swayed parrot-fish and small green fishes with ruby eyes.

In the clear stillness of the dawn the whole scene seemed extraordinarily unreal. Surely it was all fantastic illusion ! But no, this was what he had dreamed of the tropic seas . . . and behold they realised, and even surpassed his dream. They surpassed his dream, that was it. He had not dreamed of the terrifying indifference. This beauty was alien, acid on account of its excessive sweetness. His æsthetic sense was strung to a pitch where pleasure became pain.

He had meant to bathe when the sun rose, but now he remained inactive. His senses were caught in a spell. Was it a wonder that to this island-sea was attributed a magic quality, and that the natives only dared come here on special occasions ? On his right was the magic island of Lula. He saw that it was formed by a small extinct volcano, whose crest rose above the surrounding growth of trees. He had never landed there, though he had meant to on his last visit. Somehow he had not done so, and also he had no inclination to land. He had meant to shoot water-fowl, but his gun lay untouched. He laid the paddle beside it and let the boat drift.

After a little while he noticed that a current was drawing the canoe in among the islands. He noticed that the current grew faster, and that other floating objects were being washed along towards the shores

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of Lula. The current became swifter, the movement of the water was pleasant. Blunt was sleepy after his night's hard paddling. In a sort of dream he watched the shores of the island coming closer. Then through his trance he saw a large bough of a tree being whirled along in front of the boat; it suddenly stood on end, shook to and fro, was sucked under and disappeared.

A gust of fear, cold and yet scalding, seemed to drench the whole of Blunt's body. He seized his paddle, drove it into the water and shot the canoe away to the left. Was the place indeed haunted? Was this a trap set by the treacherous God of that amazing beauty? Blunt remembered stories he had heard the natives tell: how a spirit called Naki sucked men down into the depth of the ocean, and there devoured them. He could hear, as the boat swung sideways, a sucking ingurgitation of the waters.

Not till more than half a mile separated him from the spot did Blunt pause. He listened. Apart from his own deep breathing everything was still. Yes, this beauty of the tropic sea was beyond all his expectations. It was uncanny. He, who had lived at Matana for eight years and had never been moved by its gibbering spirits, had been terrified by the silent mystery of that whirling current.

That afternoon he landed on the mainland, and slept for some hours in a native hut. He did not

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tell the natives anything of his adventure, but felt glad to be among men whom he knew would sympathise with his wild and sudden fear. On his way back to the shore he noticed some large passion-fruit. He picked two, but threw the second away as being too sweet.

In the evening he paddled back to Matana. An inexpressible discontent followed him. It was strange of Matherson to think of introducing a white woman into this life of isolation.

The next day he felt languid and good-for-nothing, and in the evening was taken by a fit of shivering. The room was intolerably hot; the drone of the mosquitoes in the roof sounded like the roar of some wild animal. He put on his clothes and walked to and fro in front of the house. In the air he felt better. The next day he was feverish, but went about the plantation as usual.

All the time Blunt had been at Matana he had never been ill. He did not mean to cave in now. The next day he felt worse, but continued to go about. He believed that he had a slight attack of dysentery and put the blame on the passion-fruit, though he admitted that the night visit to the islands might have something to do with his unexpected sickness. The natives noticed that he was unwell; they watched him with an interested scrutiny. What now accentuated his feeling of loneliness, and also surprised him, was that they made no offer of assistance. The women of his house seemed almost to avoid

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him. They were not actually hostile, but they stood aside and left him to his fate. He knew now that he was an alien. It was because of his strength and his wealth that they had shown him deference. Should these disappear, he was of small account.

On the third evening he mentioned his sickness to Uloto. She said that was to be expected after visiting the islands at night and alone.

"Do you think that has anything to do with it?" he asked.

"The Naki makes bad-magic in that place," she answered.

That was it, they believed he had incurred the wrath of the Naki. His illness was fated; they would not dare offer any help. Blunt cursed them as a benighted people, moving in darkness. He was home-sick. He, who had always been self-reliant, wanted help. For a long time he tossed on his bed, alternately shaken by fits of heat and cold. When at last he slept, he had a terrible dream.

He was once more in the canoe. It was drifting over the placid, emerald water. The current was carrying it towards the sacred island. Now the canoe was moving faster. He knew what that meant, and looked for the paddle that he might strike away to the left. The paddle was gone. A hand had come up out of the sea and taken it. There in the midst of the green water was the whirlpool. The canoe tilted, and was engulfed. He

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was shooting down an inclined plane of smooth, black water. The sea was curled back in foam-ridged waves on either side ; he could hear them suck together as they closed behind the canoe. There was a wide open space over the sea-floor ; the waters formed glistening, perpendicular walls. To the right and left were pillars of rock, and in the centre a throne of basalt. On it sat the Naki. He was like Pinjaroo, only ten times larger. His face had the same malignant immobility. He spoke in a soft, thick voice, which seemed to come from far away, and yet to be whispered close to Blunt's ear.

"So you have come to me at last," said the Naki. "The white stranger has come."

"What do you want ?" asked Blunt.

"Retribution."

"I am not afraid of you, though I have always disliked your expression." The Naki's eyes were cold as stone, and Blunt shouted at him in a gust of anger. "Don't think you are going to frighten me. Death comes to all. I am not afraid of death."

"It is what comes afterwards." The Naki's voice sounded infinitely far away. The Naki's lips moved and the word roared in Blunt's ears. "Responsibility, have I no responsibility to my people ?"

Blunt understood now the expression that lay behind that mask of a face ; it was contempt and

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envy. The voice continued : " You have polluted their blood, have sent half-caste children to the camp at Matana."

Blunt saw the women whom he had taken to his house. They were waiting for the command of the Naki, and they had long knives. Strong hands were upon him, he was carried to a central pillar, was swung backwards and forwards. Then thud—his skull was broken against the rock. The women came forward and cut up his body ; he could see it all. The feast was prepared, then the Naki whispered very low. The devil-spirits of Matana came howling through the plantation. For the first time he saw them ; the swollen red one ; gibbering with rage, and the small pale one, whose eyes alone were red, squealing with indignation. They fell upon the feast that the women had made ready. The red and bloated devil sat in the midst and buried his long teeth in the white flesh. He grabbed all for himself. The pale indignant one, in a far corner, gnawed at a severed foot. Blunt woke with a scream of horror.

He was still alive. The lamp was still burning on the table. Uloto came to the door, wondering why he had screamed. How young and childish she looked, but she had been there to take a hand at the cutting-up.

" It is nothing," said Blunt. " I had a bad dream." The girl looked at him with a gleam of interest, and nodded her head. He waved her

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away and began to dress himself. Death he could face, but not dreams like that. He sat down and wrote a letter to Matherson, told him he was ill, and asked him to send over some opium-bismuth mixture. For the rest of the night he paced his room, and in the morning sent a runner to Nathamaki.

In the evening Matherson arrived, and brought with him a selection of medicine from his chest. For a week the missionary stayed at Matana and at the end of the time Blunt was convalescent. He was still weak, but the fever had left him. On the last evening of Matherson's stay, the two men sat on the verandah talking.

"I know how busy your work keeps you at Nathamaki; I am sorry to have caused you this trouble," said Blunt, then added with a touch of friendly mockery, "Your flock must have missed you."

"You see," Matherson replied, "that none of us are always able to take care of ourselves."

Blunt did not answer. He was thinking what a different man he was when talking to Matherson from the man who wandered by himself in the jungle. It was strange to be so divided. He thought his soul must be a sort of half-caste. Was it the superficial part that was white and the deeper part black? He couldn't tell, but thought the division not so simple. He only knew that the wild jungle part was very serious, it was furtive too, and shy,

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while the white element found amusement in chaffing Matherson and mocking at himself.

Matherson spoke again. "That we are none of us able to take care of ourselves brings me back to our conversation of last time."

Blunt remained silent; he had known that this was coming.

"Your mind is still firm that you will not write the letter that I suggested?"

"Is it fair-play, do you think, to bring a white woman to a place like this?" Blunt looked hard at his companion.

"In your letter you would describe fully the conditions, the isolation."

"But even then?"

"As I have said, it would not be *any* woman who would answer that call. But if it is God's wish that you should be helped, the call would be answered; and I do not doubt that it would be the way of advancement for the woman also. God has care for each of his children."

Blunt mused a little. "It must be very comfortable," he said, "to think of all the world arranged like some complicated Chinese puzzle put together by God. Does it all fit in so completely?"

"Completely and obviously," said Matherson, smiling. "The sea fits neatly and accurately into the cliffs, the cliffs fit neatly and accurately into the shapes of the waves. The stream fits its bed. What Chinese puzzle could be more complete?"

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"What about those howling spirits in the plantation, and the ignorance and sin from which you talk of saving these people?"

"Sin has always been a mystery difficult to understand," said Matherson seriously. "Man, if he is to grow, must strive against it. Though sometimes I am tempted to believe that it is as much a part of God's plan as anything else."

"All the time I've been here at Matana," Blunt began, in a new strain, "I've thought I was happy and contented. I was, too, till you came. I've always hated missionaries, and I made up my mind to dislike you. But you were different from what I'd expected. Now I should miss you. I'm changed most damnably, and it worries me. Yes, I'll write that letter; but, look here, I won't have these natives missionised. They must remain as they are."

Matherson smiled at Blunt's petulance. "I didn't know you were such a confirmed conservative," he said. "That's the worst of you free-thinkers. Be consoled. I shall not bother you much here at present; I have a tremendous lot of work at Nathamaki. If you write that letter I will take it with me. I shall be going across to Tomanta next week."

"It seems a mad sort of thing to do, and I don't suppose anything will come of it. It's the best way to get the idea out of my head, and to prove how futile it is. But now, let me ask you the same

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question : Why haven't you done this yourself ? How is it you manage to live single ? "

" The case is different," said Matherson gently. " I have my mission."

Blunt looked at the small and rather insignificant physique that burnt with such unquestioning ardour, and felt both envy and pity. What strange part of the scheme was it that he should intrude into this alien land ? Whence his confidence to corrupt and break the tenets of a religious people ? If he were successful there would follow in his wake depraved traders, gin-sellers and all the virulent diseases of civilisation. From civilisation, Blunt had himself fled, he had come to these savages, who had tolerated him, and made him rich with their labour. He owed them his protection. He felt that he loved them, as he loved the jungle, with a disillusioned and a cautious love. Why should the brave and generous Matherson be the herald of the civilisation that he hated ? He felt that the complexity of the Chinese puzzle of which they had been speaking was beyond comprehension.

That night Blunt wrote a long letter to his sister in England, and the next day Matherson rode away with it to Nathamaki. When Matherson reached his solitary white dwelling on the hill, he also wrote a long letter, which he sent in a covering envelope to Blunt's sister. He explained, as clearly as he could, all the circumstances of the case, mentioning

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the difficulties of a life of isolation to a man separated from his women folk. When he had sealed the envelope he knelt down and prayed for God's blessing upon his labours.

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## CHAPTER III

### THE NARROW WAY

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#### I

THE wind blew steadily from the north-west, and the cutter leaned far over on her port side as she headed southwards. Blunt was happy once more ; he had recovered his poise. In the last few months, he had found a new occupation. For some time there had been talk in Tomanta of the profit of sethi-fishing. On his occasional visits, Blunt had listened to the reports of affluence quickly gathered. Now he had launched a small venture of his own. He had bought another boat and manned it with a native crew. The two craft were now heading towards reefs where sethi might be found. He was exhilarated by this life on the open sea ; the copra business had been too easy. He was already a rich man ; it would amuse him if he could double his wealth. And if he lost on the hazard, it would not matter. For the first time he was taking Uloto for a sea trip. The girl, who had never been so far

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from the shore before, was delighted by the newness of the experience. She sat in the bows, her black hair streaming in the wind. Pinjaroo sat near the mast, and a young native called Koro-Koro stood beside him. Blunt had chosen Pinjaroo as his assistant partly because he knew the man disliked him, and was therefore better under observation, and partly because he was interested to try and fathom his taciturn and malignant character. It amused him to think of Pinjaroo as a diminutive copy of The Naki. If any man were good at discovering the secrets of the seas, surely Pinjaroo should be he.

Uloto kept up a running stream of conversation. No one troubled to keep pace with her, though sometimes Blunt or Koro-Koro would answer one of her questions. Pinjaroo, as usual, remained silent and sucked at his pipe. Blunt was thinking of the time of his illness, which seemed very far distant, and of Matherson, whom he had only seen once in the last six months. What a contrast was this life on the seas to the shut-in existence behind the plantation. He thought for a few moments of the letter he had written ; but, of course, no one would be mad enough to answer. He need not bother about that. Since the time of his illness, he had re-established his position among the natives. Matana was once more his by right of conquest ; and if there were times on the mainland when he felt himself an alien and a stranger shut off from

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the deeper life of the people, here on the open sea, and in the hard manual work on the reefs, there lived a feeling of fellowship which no difference of faith or colour could lessen.

"There are reefs about a mile distant," said Koro-Koro, " Illagaroo has seen them too ; he is signalling from the other boat."

Pinjaroo stood up and gave words of direction as to the length and trend of the reef. His face showed a slight animation. He had a quick, smooth way of moving, which always came as a surprise after his habitual tranquillity. He now stood in the bows and gave directions ; Uloto had come down to the stern. Blunt sailed close up to the reef, then, lifting the centre-board, they sailed over. On the lee side he came to the wind and dropped anchor.

Then began the work of collecting the heavy conical shells. The three men waded waist-deep over the surface of the reef, and where the shells lay in pools or channels, Pinjaroo and Koro-Koro dived, collecting them in baskets. They pitched the fish on to the deck to die in the sun, and Uloto began the work of pulling them out of their shells by means of a steel fork. When clean they were thrown into the hold. Illagaroo and his crew were working further down the reef, and from time to time the natives shouted to one another. Pinjaroo was more animated than Blunt had ever seen him. He liked the diving and swam to far better advantage than he walked.

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Towards evening, they sailed on towards the islands of Jhurla. Here for a week they camped, and fished among the reefs, till the holds of both boats were full. These expeditions did not as a rule last long on account of the stench that the shells gave out. For however careful one might be in extracting the fish, small portions remained in the shell. These, under the rays of a tropical sun, quickly decomposed.

After returning from such expeditions, Blunt would settle down to the life on the plantation with a feeling of contentment. It was pleasant to be back, and after each absence he felt more strongly the charm of Matana. He felt that the natives were right in attributing special qualities to the place. It was as if Nature had here found the perfect expression of one of her moods. The wind did not penetrate into that cleft in the hills ; only the plantation stirred. The air round the house was still. Plants flourished exceedingly. One could hear them growing in the still, damp air. As Blunt sat on his verandah in the evening, he could hear leaves of bananas and strelitzias slipping over each other as they unfolded and straightened their long, curled edges. Sometimes Matana seemed to him as if it were the still centre of a whirlpool, towards which swirled the intense and silent life of all the land. There was the shimmering expanse of the sea. Matana was aware of its magic. The haunted grove, the black-green jungle, the twisted

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stems of the trees and the long, swaying creepers. All this life converged towards Matana, the vivid nucleus of quiet. The tall yellow jungle-grass was the inner lining of that concentration. To the landward were the unexplored expanses of the hills : Matana was surely the focus of that savage life.

For eight years Blunt had lived there alone. He had been touched and moulded by the powerful spirits of the land, so that his soul had become mute and bewildered. But he rejoiced in the spell of wildness that the forest Gods had driven into his heart. He had grown to love Matana with its regular monotony of days, the simple routine of human life which week after week continued with the same humble repetition. The people of the jungle lived as the jungle would have them live. Their Gods were the reflections of that power. They knew no others, and did not question. Blunt felt that they were not yet conscious of life, and for this he loved and envied them. It was good to live in the centre of unconscious life.

Among the women that Blunt had taken into his house was Tala Ebu. When he first knew her she was sixteen. She had borne him a child a year after his arrival. Unlike the other girls who had lived only for short periods at the house, she had remained. Now at twenty-four she was gaunt, tall and rather ugly ; she looked quite middle-aged, and fully realised that her youth and attractions

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were things of the past. Blunt's relation with Ebu was different from his relation with any of the other women. He had always tried to meet the natives upon their own footing ; those elements of human nature common to all mankind should be sufficient for the relationship. He had wished to suppress any emotion of an individual character. In this he had been largely successful, but towards Ebu he had always felt an apologetic kind of affection. And now that she had grown ugly, he liked her for her cheerful uncouthness ; and if the slim, dark-eyed girls could symbolise the nascent growth of the tropics, Ebu, in her ample, ungainly maturity, symbolised something of its more pronounced savagery and longing, of the dark shadows and the bright sunlight. He always remembered to give her presents. He liked her for her quick-changing moods, and for the easy way in which she laughed.

Ebu and Uloto were very good friends. When Blunt had been ill after his night among the northern islands, they had both thought he was going to die. The Naki would certainly not allow a white man to trespass with such impudity. When he was cured they were astonished, and held in high regard the strong magic of the white medicine-man.

"The magic of the white stranger is stronger than that of the Naki," said Ebu. "I am glad that the master will grow well again."

"He will go again to Tomanta and bring me more beads."

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"Perhaps ; if he does not grow tired of you."

Uloto tossed her head. "He will not grow tired of me for a long time. Why should he ?" And she looked very confident.

Ebu shrugged her shoulders and made no answer, then after a pause she said, "Remember that the white men often use their magic for evil, and be careful lest you anger them."

"The master does not make magic," said Uloto with a note of fear in her voice.

"No, he is a good man, but be careful lest you meet the other at night time."

"What spell would he make against me ?"

"I cannot tell. Evil moves easily in the darkness ; and do you not know that he lives alone without a woman ?"

"Why does he do that ?"

"At Nathamaki they say he speaks with spirits daily ; from them he gains his power. No woman could bear that."

Uloto shuddered. "I am glad I do not live at Nathamaki," she said.

"You are a baby," laughed Ebu ; "see how easy it is to frighten you."

Blunt's footstep was heard on the verandah outside. Ebu rose to attend to a pot that was cooking. When the white man entered, Uloto remained squatting where she was. She looked carelessly at him with quick, short glances. Blunt hung up his hat and asked when supper would be

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ready. He told Ebu to call him ; then he went out again.

After supper they left the hot room and sat in the cool night air. Blunt sat in his cane chair and smoked, and the women squatted on the floor chatting and sucking their clay pipes. Near the village bull roarers were being swung. The humming, moaning sound seemed to come from all directions.

"What's all the noise about ? " asked Blunt, "anything special happening ? "

"Koro-Koro takes his first woman to-night."

"Who is it—Mata ? "

"No, did you not hear ? " said Ebu.

Blunt shook his head.

"His time of waiting is only just finished," continued Ebu.

"I expect he's jolly glad it's all over." Blunt knew well of the long period of probation and of the terrible initiation ceremonies that adolescent youth must undergo before he had attained all the marks of manhood. At twelve years old the initiations begin. The boy is made to stand in running water. His eldest tribal brother then places a wooden peg against one of his front teeth. Then, with a sharp blow from a mallet, he knocks it out. Other ceremonies follow at intervals for the next five years, during which time the religious consciousness of the tribe is literally cut into the flesh of the growing boy.

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"Did he come well through the tests?" Blunt questioned.

"Yes."

"Even the first blood-drinking?"

"Yes."

"That's lucky for his eldest sister," Blunt said with a laugh. He knew that if the initiate's stomach turned at the first gulp of warm human blood and he vomited, then his eldest sister would die. She would not die because any bodily harm was done her, but because every one in the tribe and she herself believed that she would die. Blunt had not lived with savages for eight years without being aware of the power of suggestion.

"But what happened to Mata?" he asked after a pause. "She was a nice little thing. Wasn't she promised to him?"

"She was, but she was killed."

"Who by? I heard nothing of it."

"Pinjaroo did not wish anyone to speak of it," said Ebu moving nearer. "But now that Koro-Koro has another woman, there can be no harm."

"What happened?"

"She was a bad woman, not content to wait. She desired Koro-Koro before the appointed time. Last spring, when he went into the hills, up on to the plateau, by himself, to find food, she followed. He was on the highlands where the bushes are far apart and running is easy. He was tracking a bee

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to its home that he might take the honey. Mata followed, tracking his footsteps. The bee went into a hole in a hollow tree. When Koro-Koro found it, he put down his spear and climbed up to try and split the wood with his adze. Mata found him ; she threw a pebble, which hit his leg : you know the custom ? He turned and saw her close by. It was not difficult to see from how she stood, and how she looked, why she had come." Ebu paused and laughed ; "Koro-Koro is a good boy, but he is young and hot ; he knew that he was not always strong, and that the tribe were a long way distant. He knew his danger. He slid down the tree, and Mata came towards him. If he were not quick, she would be too strong for him. Ptas !" said Ebu excitedly. "He bent down, picked up his spear, and threw it. It struck her breast and went through her back." Ebu indicated the place. "Mata fell down, but she was not dead. Koro-Koro was frightened, but knew better than to go to her, though she called. He left her and ran back here. He told Pinjaroo and the old men. They went with him, and when they found Mata, she was dead. They saw from the foot-prints that Koro-Koro had not been up to her. 'You are a good man,' said Pinjaroo. 'At the right time we will find you another woman,'" Ebu chuckled, holding her knees. "To-night his time is complete, he takes a woman."

"With a good conscience," Blunt added to

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himself as a comment. "But what a people ! What piety ! and what a simplification of life ! Could Matherson improve on that for religious rectitude ? " he wondered.

"And what do you think about it ? " he asked. Ebu shook her head. Such a question was foolishness ; she did not answer, but puffed at her clay pipe.

For a long time after the women had turned in for the night, Blunt sat thinking in his chair. He admired that piety, though he despised it too. This was the basis of all dogma, something antagonistic to instinct, something that could bend and hold nature rigid. But why ? Why this obedience against all discretion, all reason ? He had asked that question before, and had fled to the jungle, where he had hoped to find freedom. "Freedom," what an empty word ! It had less meaning than Koro-Koro's piety.

And what after all had he gained ? The painful relaxation of a tropical night. How still was the darkness ! . . . What did men seek ? Some kind of intoxication. . . . That was it, surely. . . . If man was drunk, no matter with what, then he was happy. Matherson and Koro-Koro they were both intoxicated in their different ways. They both walked the blind and narrow way. . . . "Co-religionists." Blunt muttered under his breath. Both were ready to sacrifice themselves and others to the madness of their God. He had met the

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same thing everywhere, and all his life he had refused to be drunk.

### II

The missionary's house at Nathamaki was on the side of a knoll, which rose straight from the sea. Here winds continually rustled the leaves of the screw-pines, and even on the hottest day the air had a freshness. Thick grass clothed the hill behind the house, and from the crest, a hundred feet above sea-level, could be seen a magnificent expanse of ever-changing colour. The sea was nearly always calm like an old mirror into whose depths so many images have sunk and faded that now no individual form could be reflected. Upon the horizon, which ever way one looked, were the hills of far distant islands. In the early morning they looked like bubbles of opal floating on Venetian glass, and in the evening their sharp contours, so symmetrically placed, suggested that they formed the rim of a vast crater of an extinct volcano in which the placid mirror of the sea was contained.

Matherson had had his mission-house built upon this crest, and here, whenever he was in residence at Nathamaki, he worked for several hours each day. Every morning he would look at the marvellous view of sea and island, and would feel flow

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from his heart a limitless praise. Matherson never doubted that he was happy at Nathamaki. Early in his youth he had repeated with fervent humility "Not my will, oh Lord, but thine." And now, although that attitude of mind had grown into an unbreakable habit, he daily repeated the prayer with the same fervency. And Matherson *was* happy; he had found God's will written plain and simple. "Go thou out into the world and preach the gospel." God's will had sent him to Nathamaki, and each day as he beheld the beauty of that tropical sea, he read there messages sent to him by the source of all love and beauty. Since he had walked in the way God had shown him, he had found life very simple. He had no fears and no personal hopes.

But life at Nathamaki was not lacking in incident. With his vigour and enthusiasm, Matherson had not failed to make an impression on the natives. As a result of two years of work, his mission was well established. More than four-fifths of the tribe were confessed Christians, but though they might modify some of their more barbarous customs, the deeper-rooted elements of their own primitive religion remained not far beneath the surface. Lately there had been movement and uneasiness among the neighbouring tribes, there were reports that other coastal villages had been raided from the interior. Matherson had gone to investigate, he had made an expedition inland, and had fallen

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in with a wandering tribe. The natives had seemed friendly, but were uncommunicative. He had stayed among them for some time and had preached the gospel. As usual he had succeeded in arousing interest. Several promised that they would come to Nathamaki in peace and see the house that he had built there to his God, yet Matherson knew the natives well enough to set little store by such promises. It was their custom to give answers that they considered pleasing, and then forget what they had said. He was reassured as to their intentions by there being women with the tribe. These people were not on the war-path, and he gathered from a few overheard remarks that no raids were yet contemplated. He returned to Nathamaki to give confidence to his own people and assure them of his protection.

Matherson had not often met with so little success as at Matana. Undoubtedly they were a wild people deeply involved in their native savagery. He had a theory that they were a hill tribe, who had raided the coast, and, having exterminated the original inhabitants, lived there in their place. This conjecture seemed likely to be correct, as not only were they different from the other coastal tribes, but were on friendly terms with the people of the interior. They were certainly not susceptible to new ideas. But never did Matherson consider the possibility of giving up their conversion; he was content to delay this for a little, especi-

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ally as he now had so much work at Nathamaki.

Only once during the six months after Blunt's illness did Matherson find opportunity to go to Matana. On that occasion he was distressed to find how much his friend was given over to native practices. It was the time when the sacred dances were celebrated. Blunt attended them regularly, observing the heathenish ritual. He assured the missionary that it was from a scientific interest, but admitted that there was also an emotional appeal. "These people are in the process of creating their own Gods," he had said. "Gods in their own likeness, but possessing all the wonder of the unknown. They are involved in the natal labours of the first abstract ideas, the first abstract ideas that have dawned upon their world. This is the very progeniture of God."

Matherson told him not to pretend to a paganism alien to his nature and civilisation.

Blunt laughed. "It would widen your imagination to attend these dances yourself. A man with your religious perception could not fail to appreciate their pious and mystical sincerity."

The missionary did not think it worth while to argue the point. Blunt seemed incorrigible, he could but continue to pray for him. He knew that much could be accomplished by prayer.

After his expedition into the interior, Matherson went across to Tomanta for a few days' visit. Every two months he went across for his mail,

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and on these occasions he would meet some of his colleagues and discuss his work. Among the thick parcel of letters waiting for him at the post office was one from Eva Dixon. Miss Dixon wrote in answer to his letter of seven months back. The letter, which was sent from Gillingham, Dorset, stated that she was a distant relative of Blunt's, and that she had a slight remembrance of having seen him as a young man when she herself was a child. She wrote that she fully realised how unusual such a venture might seem to a third party, but that she was willing to take the position of housekeeper at Matana. She fully understood the difficulty of the position, she was not a young girl, being twenty-eight years old, and she knew what she was about. She would not mince words, as it was best that they understood each other ; she realised from what Matherson had said that she might probably be expected to marry Blunt before very long. She would not explain why she made this extraordinary decision, beyond saying that she had given it the most serious thought and had prayed to God to direct her course. She was not actuated by any selfish motive, but felt a definite call to offer her help to another human being who was in need. "Call" was the very word that Matherson himself had used. His heart beat fast with excitement as he read.

"The men who are pioneers and workers in distant lands get too little sympathy," she wrote.

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"Women, I think, should be willing to come to their assistance. I will confess that the idea has taken a great hold on me, giving a new joy to my life. For the first time for many months the way has been made plain. It may seem narrow and difficult, but it is clear."

She added, that since his own and Blunt's letter were so explicit she would not wait for an answer, but would travel out in a boat that should bring her to Tomanta a month after the arrival of her letter. Matherson's heart beat even faster than before. She had spoken of a "call" and of "the way being made plain." God had spoken to her. His prayer had been answered. Then he thought of his last visit to Matana, of Blunt among the black women and the savage dances. For a moment he was a little frightened at what he had done. But he also walked in the narrow way, he would not doubt God's wisdom.

He called again at the post office and found that there was a letter for Blunt. It was in the same bold, clear handwriting. He looked at the date of arrival on the post-mark. It was already a week old ; in three weeks time she would be here. He must return at once. There was no time to be lost.

During his return journey to Nathamaki, Matherson determined that he would send a native runner with Blunt's letter. It would be better for Blunt to meet the situation alone. His decision as to

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his course of action would then be of his own making. Matherson rightly judged that in this crisis he would prefer to take all responsibility upon himself.

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## CHAPTER IV

### FIRST IMPACT

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#### I

**B**LUNT sat on a white coral rock with white coral sand at his feet and read the letter under the glare of a midday sun. He was reading it for the fifth time. The runner from Nathamaki had brought him the letter while he was walking along the beach. Half-way through the first reading he had sent the fellow flying with an oath. At the end of the second he had cursed himself as a fool, and cursed Matherson. At the end of the third he had sat down on the rock and remained silent. He had sat thinking and grinding the sand with his heel. At the end of the fourth, he had looked carefully at the handwriting ; he had studied how the letters were formed and terminated, the up strokes and the down strokes. Now as he read it for the fifth time he was moved by a strange excitement.

DEAR MR. BLUNT,—

Your sister has shown me your letter asking for

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a housekeeper, and a letter written by Mr. Matherson at the same time. This was some days ago, and I have therefore been able to give the matter most careful consideration. I have decided that I should like to take the post. The salary you mention will be quite satisfactory. As I am not dependent on my own exertions, this is not of primary importance to me. I am twenty-eight years old, and think I fully realise the loneliness of Matana and the nature of the post I am taking.

As you and Mr. Matherson have both written so fully, and as the mail out and back takes so long a time, I have decided not to wait for an answer. I see that the first boat that sails for Wainang is the *Amra*, and that there is another steamer sailing in connection from that port to Tomanta which arrives on the twenty-third of July. I hope it will not be difficult for you to arrange to meet me.

We are, I believe, distantly connected, and we met once some thirteen years ago at your sister's twenty-first birthday party. Please believe that I am prepared for work and will not complain of hardships.

Yours very truly,  
EVA DIXON.

What could he tell from that letter? He couldn't in the least remember ever having met her. She

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must be the daughter of old Edgar Dixon who had been doctor in Gillingham for many years. He had long been dead, but Blunt remembered that he had been rather a remarkable old fellow, very religious, and the country people believed that he had some miraculous healing power. He had been both feared and loved. His daughter was not likely to be an adventuress. . . . What would she be like? It was a hard business-like letter; it jarred upon him. No, there was not much to be read between the lines. It was a business letter. . . . Well, if she was coming, there was no stopping her. Confound Matherson for having written; he never knew Matherson was going to write. . . . She was twenty-eight, quite a young woman; an older woman would have written a longer letter, and would have made more of their distant connection. . . . Could he remember having seen her? There were so many cousins at that party. She was twenty-eight and he was forty-five. . . . It would be strange seeing a woman of his own set again. She would be different from the pale, pasty-faced daughters of the German storekeepers at Tomanta.

He folded the letter and put it in his pocket. No, he didn't want her. He had been ill, not normal when he wrote. He wanted to be left alone. . . . Damn! he couldn't put her off. He had written one letter, and his life was to be changed. He looked at the long line of surf and the white sand.

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This was no place for a woman. At any rate she was plucky, or damned foolish. A housekeeper! What a bloody sort of fool he was. He thought of his sister's twenty-first birthday party, then of old Edgar Dixon. What sort of a freak must the woman be. He went back and picked up his roye that he had left by the rock, then he walked towards the plantation. As he passed out of the sun's glare, a quick pulse of excitement stirred his heart. What was she like? She came of good stock, eccentric perhaps, but a good county family. She was twenty-eight. An Englishwoman was young at twenty-eight. He was going to Tomanta to meet her, nothing should stop him from going to meet her.

Up at the house Blunt found Ebu and Uloto. He frowned at the problems ahead. He spoke little to the two women, but announced that he would be away for a couple of days, perhaps longer. In the afternoon he visited Pinjaroo and Illagaroo.

He was glad to be on board the cutter and alone. To be able to think and feel as a white man, it was necessary to leave Matana behind. He headed for the open sea. That night he slept under the stars, letting the boat drift over the smoothly undulating waves. The next morning he set the course seaward again, and soon the land was but a mauve and serrated edge on the horizon. While the boat sailed gently on over the clear water, and

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the sun's rays fell scorchingly, he knew with a vivid perception that this new adventure was an ordered part of his fate. He must let go his solitude and his wild passion for Matana. The moment had struck while he had not been aware. He had been unconscious of his approaching fate. Now the event was upon him. He must let go that which he had sought and loved, and which for eight years had been the meaning of his life. To be able to let go, that was perhaps the secret of life . . . and to take up new threads.

As the day passed and the blue and silver lights of the sea's surface changed and blended into green undertones, thoughts came like a recurring procession. Amidst the calm of a sparkling sea, the thirst for life stirred in his heart, and, as the sun went down in the crimson glow of its descent, he was sure of his new truth. The moment was ripe ; it had been ripe and he had not known it. Subconsciously it had been his real self that had written the letter. Its sincerity had compelled belief. He was glad, and would go to meet her as a boy meets a new adventure.

Through the night he sailed slowly back towards Matana. The next day he told Ebu and Uloto that they were to return to the native village. He gave the order without any comment or explanation, beyond saying that he would have Koro-Koro and another boy to be his servants. Uloto was bewildered and incredulous, she was sulky. Ebu

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was silent, but Blunt saw that she was very angry. Well, that could not be helped. Blunt had never been afraid of the natives, he would not begin by fearing two women.

The house seemed strange and empty when they were gone. The whole of Matana seemed to be changed, to wear a different aspect. He had to teach the boys how to serve him. He was uncomfortable and lonely. But discomfort or loneliness mattered little, his thoughts were guessing at the future. His imagination was playing fantastic games with the half-remembered faces of women. Then the recurring question, was it not a crime to allow a white woman to come among so fierce a tribe? He had lived in peace and security for eight years. He assured himself there was nothing to fear. But he must warn her, she must yet have time to return.

During the next days he watched the men to see if they were angry that he had sent away Ebu and Uloto, but could see no sign of resentment. Men did not concern themselves with women's affairs, but he knew that the women were angry.

One evening he was walking near the plantation. The air was very still and the sky clear. The feathery crowns of the palms were silhouetted black against a blue-green sky. Here and there the flat, expanded leaves of a platicerium fern, high up on a stem, looked like the shape of some mis-shapen dwarf that crouched, eyeing him. In

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the distance he heard the voices. They were faint and scarcely distinguishable at first, but came quickly nearer. He thought they were coming overhead, but they passed at a little distance. He smiled disdainfully at their performance, though he shivered inwardly. There was the fierce scream of the aggressor, the plaintive, terrified screech of the victim. They paused in sudden silence. Blunt moved uneasily. As he walked towards the house the voices followed in frantic duologue to the limit of the plantation. Blunt thanked God that the woman was coming hard upon her letter. To have waited longer would have been intolerable.

At first Blunt had wondered that he had neither seen nor heard anything of Matherson, then—as he realised how much he felt the relief of being alone during this time of waiting—he guessed that Matherson would leave him to see the thing through, and not make any appearance till Eva Dixon had been some days at Matana. He was glad of this, but to make sure sent a note to Nathaimaki saying that he was going in to Tomanta on the twenty-third to meet Miss Dixon, and hinting that he would be glad to be left alone for the first few days. Then he settled down to wait the remaining time.

The night before he was to start for Tomanta he went down to the native village. There were to be dances and afterwards magic ritual. That last evening of solitude Blunt needed to taste to the full the savagery of Matana.

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An open space had been cleared and covered with mats between the grass houses. Torches of resinous wood burned to illumine the scene. Blunt sat among the men. First there was the ceremonial kava drinking. They sat in a wide circle. Pinjaroo was making the kava ; he rubbed the pieces of white root against a stone, then rinsed them in water with the fibrous skeleton of a gourd. He chanted rhythmically ; and, when the drink was prepared, called out in a deep voice. Illagaroo filled the first cocoanut shell and, squatting on his haunches, hopped to where Blunt sat. Blunt emptied the shell at a draught, and, following the custom, threw it spinning back into the middle of the circle. He shouted "Wah Wah" and clapped his hands. The men answered him with a deep bass "Wah Wah" and clapped. Illagaroo next offered the drink to Pinjaroo. He went in turn from one to another, each being served in order of rank, and after each had drunk he flung back the shell and shouted.

After they had all drunk, came the first dances by the girls. They were naked save for a small girdle, but were hung about by green, pungent-smelling herbs. They danced at first slowly and rhythmically, but soon the time became faster, and before long they were whirling and shouting in the wildest animation. The warm air was filled by the scent of their hot bodies and the bruised herbs. The spectators applauded with loud shouts.

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Then the men danced. They danced with a different intention. The night was before them, there was no need to hurry, but as the dances followed one another the savage elation slowly kindled. It was as if their dancing feet had caught the wild meaning of the earth they trod. It rose through their legs teaching them their movement. It burned about their loins, rose to their hearts, filled their wide chests and at last found outlet in cries. Blunt too was intoxicated by the wild violence. He felt as he had felt when he first witnessed these dances. They carried him away into the labyrinths of past existence. His being was enfolded by the mystical, physical emanations, and the hot scent of human bodies. His heart was pierced by those cries, as of earth become articulate.

Ever since his life had been shadowed by the coming change, he had been restless, he had been consumed by new hope, mocked by past failure, and restless, very restless. To-morrow an English-woman was coming to Matana. He both dreaded and anticipated her advent. But to-night, the flame of life burned bright and single. To-night he belonged to the mystical, dim past. His soul was detached. He was mingled with the fierce spirit of the tribe. He caught the cry of its speech become articulate, symphonising with the irregular cadence of the bull-roarers.

All night he stayed among the tribes-men dreaming the dream of Matana, encompassed by the

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sweet pain of its ecstasy. But with the first light of dawn he was down on the beach, eager to start on his journey to Tomanta.

### II

The steamer had been delayed, and it was not till the next morning that the passengers walked down the gangways on to the landing-pier. Blunt stood a little back by some bales of hemp and watched them as they streamed off. Several women passed who were looking about for friends, but Blunt did not consider them. Then when they had all passed and he was wondering whether she had come after all, he saw her standing on the deck. He had no doubt as to her identity. He walked across the gangway.

"Miss Dixon?"

"Yes, are you Mr. Blunt?"

His first feeling was one of disappointment. She was not attractive in the way he had hoped. Her face was rather broad with high cheek-bones. She had a bright complexion and fair hair. Her blue eyes were large, and as he met them he felt that they at least were beautiful. She was very self-possessed. He could detect no sign of nervousness. He busied himself to help with her luggage, and as he gave orders to the native porters he knew that the sharpness of his first twinge of disappointment was already modified.

"Would you like to go to the hotel for break-

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fast," he asked, " or shall we have breakfast aboard the cutter ? " He hoped she would choose the latter. He didn't wish to have all Tomanta gossiping about his affairs.

" I have already had breakfast. I should like to start right away. Which is your boat ? "

" The one over there with the green and white hull. If you are really ready to start, I will pull across and bring her up to the pier.

She walked with him to the steps where the dinghy was tied. As he stepped in he saw such a light of childish expectancy in her eyes that he asked, " Would you care to come with me, or wait till I bring her to the pier ? "

" I should like to come if I won't be in the way ? "

" Not at all." He gave her his hand into the boat.

When they reached the cutter he asked her to sit in the pit by the tiller while he hoisted the sails. He was amused at the simplicity of her wonder at the brilliance of the sea and sky, and her delight in the boat. When it came to slipping the moorings he asked her to hold the tiller for a moment. He ran aft, and she moved to give him her place.

" Ah ! this is different from being on a steamer," she said as the sail filled and the boat moved forward. " Here one really feels the sea and the wind."

The words were simple enough and might have

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conveyed nothing, but Blunt was sensitively alert to indications of character. He was pleased at her conception of life, catching a glimpse of a bravery whose quality was of more durable material than the untried courage of youth.

After her luggage had been lowered and stowed away, Blunt sailed for the open sea. The morning breeze was freshening and the sunlight blazed in a gold stream across the sea's surface. There were a few clouds on the horizon, contrasting very white against the blue, and here and there occasional sea-gulls dipped over the waves. For some time after they had left the harbour Eva Dixon had sat silent. She seemed altogether absorbed by the sensations produced by light and sun and open sea. Then she began to talk about her voyage out. She had stayed for two days at Wainang, but had been dazzled and half stupefied, she said, by the extravagant variety of its life. It was later, as the small steamer had patiently driven its way across the placid seas, that she had felt the gentle touch of the tropics. Blunt was interested.

"Do they seem to you altogether beautiful?" he asked.

"They are cruel too," she answered.

"It does not need long to find that out."

"No."

His silence questioned her. After a moment she looked up as if to shake off evil thoughts. There was a gentle brightness in her eyes which Blunt

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noticed for the first time. He thought she looked quite charming as she sat facing him with her back to the mast. He also noticed that her fingers touched unconsciously a silver cross which hung on a light chain about her neck. He was interested to know what she had seen.

"What was it that happened?"

She hesitated. "I suppose evil sights are common, but it was the first time I had seen anything of that sort." Blunt waited. Now that she had begun to speak she found a relief in sharing the horror of her experience. "We put in at Lataka. There were some molasses and some cattle that had to come aboard. We couldn't get alongside the pier as it was low tide. The barrels of molasses were brought in boats—but the cattle." She paused. "They drove them down to the sloping end of the pier, about fifty yards from the ship. Then they put wires round their horns and with a winch from the ship dragged them across. Of course they were terrified. Men were beating the poor things and twisting their tails to urge them on. Some of their horns were twisted and bleeding and then they were half-drowned and were dragged under water. I have never seen anything so terrified as they looked as they came on board. People on the deck stood by and laughed and enjoyed it in an awful sort of way. Others were indifferent. I went to the captain and asked him why he didn't wait for high tide. He seemed to think I was a

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sort of fool, and said he couldn't waste the company's money for the sake of a couple dozen of bullocks that were to be killed as soon as they reached Tomanta."

"Yes, I've seen that often," said Blunt. "One gets callous after a time. I expect the same sort of thing happens in Europe but we don't see it."

"Not the same, surely?"

"No. You are right. There is a difference."

"The heat and the brightness of the sea and sky make a difference."

"That's it. It is stiller, quieter here; more intense, somehow." She nodded. "The natives have no idea of what cruelty is, or rather they only understand it when exercised against men. Towards animals they are quite callous, they think nothing of breaking an animal's legs if they want to keep it alive for a day or two before killing it."

"It was white men who were winding the winch," she said.

"They get callous too." Blunt felt that though she was not conscious of any spoken reproach, she was nevertheless reproaching him also. He too had grown brutal during those years of isolation. No, it was not only loneliness that made men brutal. It was also his old and hated enemy, civilisation. He laughed sardonically. "It was not the men who were winding the winch; it was the winch that was winding the men. It was civilization, trade, machinery and high dividends

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that got those beasts into the water. Do you suppose that naked, tail-twisting savages could have done it?"

She did not answer, but looked away over the brilliant surface of the sea. He felt a sudden compassion. She was a brave woman to come alone into this fierce land. How much did she understand of its cruelty? She was young in spite of her boast of being twenty-eight.

"Tell me about Matana," she said with a sudden change of expression. "I have thought about it so much and tried to picture it a hundred times. Does the word Matana mean anything in English?"

"Yes, it's rather a strange word, it means 'face,' the 'Place of the Face!'"

"It's rather uncanny."

"Do you think so? The natives think so, too. For a long time none of them would live near the shore, and even now they are frightened of the plantations at night."

"Why is that?"

He told her of the spirits that moved among the trees, and how that to behold them was supposed to be a warning of death.

"Does not Mr. Matherson teach them differently?"

He paused before answering. "If they would listen to him no doubt he would, although he hears the noises as much as anybody else. The natives at Matana follow their old religion, they are as yet unspoiled."

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"You mean that they are pagans?"

"Yes." There was a faint smile on Blunt's lips as he answered. Again he noticed that her hand went nervously to her silver cross.

"Matherson and myself are very good friends," he added. He told her of eight years of solitude, of the Davidsons, of other men who had been killed at Matana. "The natives are a difficult people. I get on well with them because I leave them alone, and know how to treat them. Many white men have been killed through making mistakes. Even Matherson, whom strangely enough they fear as a worker in magic, runs considerable risks. I want you to avoid them as much as possible. At any rate at first."

She considered for a time. "That will be difficult since I am to live among them. I want to be their friend." Then after a pause, "I must do as God directs me, but will remember your wishes."

Blunt felt a jab of annoyance. If she were perhaps religious in any bigoted fashion, would she and Matherson unite to reclaim him? He looked sternly at her, meeting the gentle seriousness of her eyes.

"You must remember," he said, "that life for white men and women is by no means safe. No one has stayed at Matana, and lived, except myself. I told you in my letter that six other men have been murdered there. You must do implicitly what I

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tell you. I wish you to avoid intercourse with the natives in every way possible."

She bent her head in submission. "I shall hope to live among them on a friendly footing as you yourself do."

As she spoke he perceived how much her words were an expression of her bodily existence. He could not expect her to live cut off from the surrounding life.

"It will take time to know them," he said. "Be prepared to go slowly. They are pious and sensitive, having their own standards. So many people think that because they are natives they can rush in and preach some crude dogma which they themselves, let alone the natives, do not understand."

"I shall hope to be friends with them and shall remember what you say," she repeated. Blunt admitted to himself that she could yield gracefully, and then he questioned whether she had yielded at all. Now, he was convinced that she was religious. Religious! The word, as generally used, had for him a repulsive significance. It so often meant bigoted, narrow-minded, self-satisfied or selfishly complacent. This woman did not outwardly appear to have any of these characteristics. Matherson was religious, but that was in a more unique sense. Blunt felt that Matherson had eaten some sweet drug that had put his intellect to sleep. Yet had he been other, Blunt would not have liked him so well. This woman would get on with Matherson,

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he considered. Yes, no doubt of that, but her quality was somehow different. There seemed to be something very simple and childish about her, something firm and transparent. He felt that she was enveloped in some mysterious medium which did not quite enable him to see her.

"We shall soon be out of sight of any land," he said. "It's over forty miles from Tomanta to the mainland. Can you still see the lighthouse outside the harbour?"

"Yes, I can just see it." After a pause she asked, "How do you know which way to sail?"

"I can tell by the sun, but I have a compass in case I were to get astray. How do you like sailing in a small boat?"

"I love it."

"So do I. I love it. But do you notice any smell about the boat?"

"Yes, there is something peculiar."

"It's lucky there's plenty of open air and breeze," he said. Then he told her about the Sethi fishing, and the problem suddenly presented itself, "What was he to do with her on those occasions of absence?" Take her with him? It would hardly be safe to leave her behind at Matana. He hurried on with the conversation, afraid to think how much his life was going to be changed. "I love getting right out to sea. It's such an entire change from the life on the mainland. At Matana one sometimes feels the oppression of the tropics more than I've

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experienced at any other place. One needs to go away."

"Can you describe Matana a little?"

"Very soon you will see the hills in the distance. They run in a range right down the coast. In most places they fall away steeply to the sea's edge, but here and there are long, flat stretches near the shore on which grow cocoanut palms. Matana is one of the largest of them. The house is behind the plantation and not far from the native village. There is a deep cleft far into the hills. There is a river there too, but even this swift river as it runs past Matana seems to be hushed and quiet. If you have ever imagined the tropics to be luxuriant and beautiful, then you will find all your imaginings there."

"When you left England did you know of such a place?"

"No, I only dreamed."

"Your dream led you here."

"Not at once." Blunt laughed abruptly. "You must make allowances, Miss Dixon, for a man who has lived alone for more than eight years. I am not accustomed to talking about myself."

"But it seems so natural to tell me something of the place where I am going to live."

He looked at her wonderingly, trying to understand why she had come to be his housekeeper at Matana. Why on earth hadn't she married? It was extraordinary.

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"Tell me more about Matana," she said.

He shook his head. "No, you will see it all for yourself. You will find its magic as others have done before. I believe, in a way, that places can be enchanted. Matana has a sort of enchantment. Something, as you said, not quite canny. The natives feel it, and express their knowledge in legends of devil-devils, and the rest. But the enchantment is there, I cannot explain how or why, but you are bound to feel it when you have lived there a little. I love the place because it is wild, and, I suppose, because I have lived there so long. But I like to get away out to sea sometimes."

"I too have always loved the sea," said Miss Dixon.

Blunt nodded. . . . "Look, you can see the hills now." She stood up for a better view, and saw the long serrated line of the mainland stretch north and south. Her heart fluttered and thrilled as she thought that there was to be her home. She turned and looked at Blunt whose eyes were steadily upon her. She was embarrassed and spoke at random.

"I wonder if you remember seeing me thirteen years ago at your sister's birthday party?"

"I can't be quite sure."

"There were so many cousins there and I was one of many. It was easier for me to notice you, because there was already talk of your leaving England. At the time it seemed rather romantic that you should be setting out to some unknown

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destination. Did you come straight to Korobello?"

"No, not for some years."

Again she looked away over the sea's ruffled surface. She was conscious of how much they two were now alone. The boat that contained them was such a speck in the midst of that universal water. Blunt, who was watching her, saw that her hand again touched the silver cross. She looked up and smiled ; she saw that he was questioning the wherefore of her coming. Before long they were bound to talk, but not yet, she did not wish it. She would like him to know her better before she spoke. Then as the sense of her loneliness swept up from the far horizons she knew her danger. Here in the tropic wildness of Korobello, LIFE, the primitive act of being, was unveiled, its power was lightly shackled ; if for a moment she were to doubt or falter, it would overwhelm her small individual spark, and carry her away. She had dreaded this pain but had not believed it would be so intense. In that moment of realisation she prayed and her courage was made whole. God's hand would save her. This man was different from what she had anticipated ; how could she yet guess how the past years of solitary existence had shaped mind and spirit ?

She was able to meet the direct scrutiny of his eyes, and with a growing confidence to speak upon the simple topics of the journey, their distance

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## FIRST IMPACT

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from the shore—to question him about pearl-fishing and the sailing of a boat.

As Blunt answered her questions he was glad that she had that power to baffle him. He sensed that her life might not be so crude a matter as plain interrogation and answer. To have married one of the shopkeepers' daughters at Tomanta would have been a simple matter. This was something more difficult. He wondered if Matherson had any idea of the forces that he had set in motion.

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## CHAPTER V

### IN THE DARKNESS

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#### I

**T**HREE are events which at the time of occurrence may pass without consciousness of acute embarrassment, which in retrospect cause a sudden checking of the vital current within, followed by a cold pulse of shame. Such memories we would sweep from our minds, but their impression is more sharply stamped than those of our rarer joys.

The day of Eva Dixon's landing at Matana was for Blunt a complex of such impressions. Even the journey across the Korobello Sea, with its moments of easy-seeming conversation, became trivial in retrospect, and took on the colour of some clumsily-performed youthful prank. His whole mental adjustment had suffered on that day a severe jerk ; so many of his imaginings and fancies had had to die quickly, without even the ceremony of an execution. The situation had been difficult for the endurance of human dignity ; and whenever

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## IN THE DARKNESS

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he remembered the misery of the landing he would catch his breath, and a cold wave of shame would pass from his bowels to the roots of his hair.

At first but a few natives were gathered upon the beach as the dinghy grounded upon the white bar of sand. They had shown more surprise at the presence of the white woman than Blunt had anticipated, and as the boat had been approaching they had shouted, and other natives had soon gathered. They had stood there, chattering and pointing, and Blunt had had to shout twice before two of them had obeyed his order to pull out to the cutter and bring off the luggage. He had been sensitively conscious of the white woman's loneliness as she suffered mutely the inspection and too obvious comments of the natives. But not then had the full humiliation of the situation come home to him. A consciousness that was to sink so deep could not fathom the whole of its distance in a second. Never indeed could he believe that it had reached the bottom, and to the end of his life he felt that it was slowly subsiding to yet deeper depths.

While the boxes were being landed from the cutter the whole tribe gathered in the plantation. He could hear the men flinging short remarks to one another, but for the most part they were now silent and watchful. Farther distant from him were the women. They stood in small groups, and their exclamations fell like hot metal rings.

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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Never would he permit himself to dwell upon the sordid business of that first landing, but often afterwards there would rise like a flame the memory of Ebu's mocking laugh as he and Eva Dixon started out together along the narrow path through the plantation. In that sound it had not been difficult to discern both hatred and malice.

The glare of the afternoon sun upon the sea and the white sand made the gloom of the inland path seem additionally dark. Beyond the plantation it led through black-leaved jungle bushes, which arched overhead and were closely intertwined with creepers. Blunt led the way ; he was filled with indignation at the natives and his own incompetence, he spoke only in monosyllables. Eva followed in silence, and two native boys, at a short distance, with luggage. While they were traversing the few hundred yards of jungle path, his anger subsided a little. It was the women who were against him, curse them. The men would have been quiet enough. Never before had he been mocked at openly. Well, he could still teach them who was master at Matana. Then he began to wonder what Eva must think of it all. He had seen her look of surprise and pain at the natives' unmistakable hostility, he could feel that she too was perplexed and angry. On the morrow he would settle with them, such an insult must never be repeated.

At the house he dismissed the two boys. He wanted to make some kind of apology but refrained,

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## IN THE DARKNESS

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feeling that was useless. He showed her the extent of the building, which was ample and comfortable enough, then left her in the large room which was to be hers, and from which one could see the bay over the tops of the palm trees.

Since the landing she had not spoken to him beyond answering his short questions or commands. And now that she was alone, of what was she thinking? She had stayed for more than an hour alone in her room. Blunt guessed that she might perhaps be praying. As for his own feelings they were too mixed for analysis, but over their everchanging web brooded a chill disappointment and the feeling that he had ill fulfilled his obligations.

When at last she joined him on the verandah, he was relieved by her fresh and cheerful appearance. They talked for a short while about the house, its position and its spacious dimensions. Then abruptly she asked :

“ You did not tell the natives that I was coming ? ”

“ No, they would not have understood.”

She paused for a few moments in thought while Blunt again noticed a look of perplexity and distress in her eyes. “ I am sorry,” he said. “ I never anticipated they would behave like that. I did not think of it. I can’t tell you how sorry I am.”

“ Oh, I mustn’t mind things of that sort. I only wish, though, that I could have spoken to them and shown them that I was a human being like themselves.”

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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So it was the unhumanness of the relation that had chiefly hurt her. "Yes, but one mustn't expect to go too fast with natives," he said cautiously. "In a day or two they will have got used to the look of you. You must remember that most of them have never seen a white woman before."

"I hope so indeed," she tried for the moment to laugh it off. "You see I've simply got to be friends with them, or what is the good of my being here?"

Blunt mused in silence. No doubt eight years of solitude had made him a bit of an egoist. He had come to think of her as primarily administering to his own contentment. Under Matherson's influence lie had thought of a white woman as an elevating exchange for several black ones. Not that that was how Matherson would have put it, but his chief impression had been of a woman, as women are thought of in low latitudes—a vague sort of symbol of his desire, a creature easily moulded, who would obey his word and accept his standard, as a native girl would obey her man. All Matherson's ideas of a woman selected by God to save his soul, though it sounded telling at the time, he had dismissed as missionary's nonsense. He had been in his anticipation, as in everything else, full of contradictions, but one at least of his imaginings, and that, he told himself, the most natural, was of a short courtship, something simple and straightforward—a matter of a few hours. Afterwards things would fall into

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## IN THE DARKNESS

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their right places. But without a doubt this woman had an existence of her own. This was different, and some inward contradicting part of him rejoiced that it was different.

"Yes, of course you will soon get on to terms with them," he conceded, "but at first you had better avoid them all you can. You must not speak to them until they get accustomed to the idea of your being here. In a little time things should work out naturally enough. You will get to know the houseboys. They will talk to the others about you, and so break the ice."

"I must believe that you are right," she said, "but to-day down on the beach I could feel that they were ready to hate me, and I felt that if I could just go and talk to them even in English they would understand that I wanted to be their friend."

Blunt did not answer. He felt, as he looked at her, that perhaps she might be right. With natives and women it was always difficult to tell; but he must not take unnecessary risks. His own plan he believed to be the safer. He became confirmed in this opinion as he thought of Pinjaroo's malevolent obesity, and besides there was Ebu, who might harbour feelings of jealousy, about which Eva Dixon could know nothing.

At their evening meal together he felt how extraordinary it was to have a woman who was so clean and obviously civilised sitting beside him. It was difficult to understand in so short a time all

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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the change that she implied. But he knew that there was already conflict between them, and that her personal dignity and her knowledge of her civilisation were her strong supports. Well, if that were all, she would not be so difficult to overcome, but he had a strengthening suspicion that there might be something else. He must not be in any hurry. She had certainly not come in any fit of romanticism, and he could guess what sort of barriers she could put up. But could any barriers for long remain unchanged in Matana? He had a strong impression that their fates and all the relationship between them was already irrevocably decided. Everything had been settled long ago. It needed only time to unfold the written scroll. He could afford to wait, and with that realisation there came a new zest for life. She was not any of the women he had imagined, but for all her confidence, she was a woman. She had a quality. She was asleep, or rather she was encased in some crystal medium. He did not doubt but that the essence of her was real.

Now that they were alone and shut in by four walls, the thought of the natives and of their ominous behaviour had sunk into the background. Life had narrowed and deepened to this personal relationship. Then as his eyes rested on the sea beyond the palm trees, he wondered whether she would weaken or strengthen his control of life; and as a sequence to this thought, whether he would weaken

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## IN THE DARKNESS

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her. Yes, he was bound to do that. Would she break or bend? Was life at Matana particularly cruel? Could she face that long solitude and yet live? He wondered if Matherson had been married, whether his advice would have been the same. How could he protect her from the scorching rays of life, from the hostile savages, from the shadowed mystery of Matana, and from himself? He shuddered at the sudden cool of the evening. Existence was a contradiction, that at least was a consoling thought. Growth was but a process of destruction. Human responsibility was only a phrase, a web of sophistry and a snare set to entangle men like himself, who perhaps lacked vitality towards the simpler issues, and whose weakness manifested itself in a futile desire for analysis—in what he was pleased to think of as philosophy.

But as they sat together talking or in silence, he could feel his newly discovered zest for life clothe itself and grow warm. Her presence was changing the aspect of the room. And while he was telling her of the details of everyday life at Matana, of the fruits and vegetables that were good to eat, of the poultry he had in the compound, his brain was working, casting about for explanations, and analysing.

He broke off suddenly, and looking directly at her said, " You must allow that it is very strange for me after eight years of solitude to have you sitting there, looking as if you had just stepped out

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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of your house at Gillingham in an English summer frock. What was it induced you to come?"

She waited, considering for what seemed quite a minute, then looking up at him she said simply, "I felt impelled to. Both your letter and that of Mr. Matherson showed so definitely that I could be useful. It has always seemed strange to me that women are prepared to do so little for the men who are pioneers in the wider parts of the earth. It seemed to be my opportunity. After the first, I didn't seem to have any choice."

"That's rather strange," he said, smiling, "why was that?"

Again she paused. "Have you ever noticed how quickly and inevitably things happen? I had lived all my life in a quiet country town, but I expected something like this would come, and then when your sister showed me your letter I saw that it gave me my opportunity. Perhaps that sounds rather romantic," she said smiling, "but it's not so really. Women's lives in England are so circumscribed. They are brought up so much to consider themselves invalids. I mean women of the middle class. Of course, really poor women have the most terrific time. But one can't artificially alter one's state just for a whim. Besides the waiting inaction of so many middle-class women may be the ordeal most necessary for them."

Blunt was puzzled. "You say one can't alter one's state for a whim?"

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## IN THE DARKNESS

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"No, one shouldn't; I don't think I've done that."

"Can you explain a little?"

Eva looked at him; then, aware perhaps of her loneliness and conscious that it was imperative that they should be honest with each other, decided to speak. She cast about for words to explain herself but could not find them. She perceived that by naming the origin and motive of her conduct, it would become tarnished. "No, I cannot explain," she said.

"You have a thirst for adventure?" Blunt hazarded.

She shook her head. "Do you think one can ever find reasons for the things that happen?"

They were silent for a few seconds. The wings of countless mosquitoes were giving out their customary dull roar from the gabled roof. "What a noise they make," she said, looking up. "Do they bite much?"

"Not as much as one would expect." Then after a pause, "Now that the moon has risen let us sit on the verandah. It is cooler there."

A half-moon was hanging over the sea, whose surface appeared very bright in comparison with the dark jungle undergrowth in the foreground. The long broken leaves of the cocoanut palms caught and reflected, from time to time, shafts of moonlight as from steel bayonets. The evening was very still, and over the hills behind the house brooded heavy rain clouds, which stretched like layers of

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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thick quilt half across the sky. Three flying foxes were flitting to and fro, sometimes descending close to the house so that the flouff flouff of their wings could be heard.

For a while the two Europeans sat talking quietly, but in a short time, as if mesmerised by some attribute of the night, they were content to sit listening to the faint noises. In that silence a growing consciousness of youth welled up within the man. Why should he question any further? Life was an unreadable mystery. Should he complain that women also were full of contradiction and mystery? Was he not free to accept whatever might come? And the complicated situation that might arise with the natives and with Matherson, all that seemed very remote, but his old love of Matana stole softly upon him in the cool night air. The silence, emphasised rather than disturbed by its faint sounds, was in itself a symbol of restraint. He looked up at the rim of the black cloud belt. After all these years he was still a civilised man. He could meet this woman on her own ground—yes—but how far and whence did it stretch? She at all events was to meet him on his. Then he remembered the nights spent at the native camp. He thought of Ebu and Uloto, and of Matherson. . . . Well, thank God life was wide. There was space and to spare for all that it might bring. Of what was the woman by his side thinking? A vain question of no significance. So long as she was

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## IN THE DARKNESS

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silent in the holy quiet of the night, that would suffice.

### II

And now he was alone again as he had sat for so many hours, through so many years, but since she had left him he was becoming restless. She had gone to the room where she was to sleep. In the wooden house he could hear the sounds of her movements. He thought of the natives and guessed at their thoughts towards him. Then like some creature out of the jungle there sprang the question : would she lock the door of her room ? He stood up and listened intently. She was very still now. Again he thought that she might be praying. Now she was getting into bed and he was positive he had not heard the key turn in the lock.

Blunt sat down in his chair ; for a few moments he had been excited and hot, now he was cool, almost cold. Now he knew that she was safe from whatever might remain of the primitive man. That element of his composition was, he mused, perhaps too weak to be dangerous. Or was it her strength that was her protection ? But now she was safe, Oh yes, quite safe, and he was far removed from those hot moments of excitement. He was glad that she had not locked the door and did not know whether to see more plainly manifested in that action a clearness of brain or a firm security of soul.

He was touched by a new sensation that was akin

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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to happiness, and while he was tasting its novelty, the first raindrops fell solid and heavy like shot upon the roof. The sky was now overclouded and the moon hidden. The rain followed quickly on the first drops with a tropical downpour. It was as if water fell in a solid sheet, and the roof sang and reverberated overhead. In spite of the roar he could hear the splash of rain on the rubbery surface of leaves and the gurgling rush of water as it streamed off the iron roof. Out of the darkness came the pungent smell of wet earth. He drew in deep breaths of the magical mingling of air, earth and water. He was glad of the intense darkness.

At the end of existence surely there was darkness—darkness or light—it mattered not which, so long as the condition was perfect and perceived by all the senses, as this was perfect. Ah, that the right thing should happen at the right time! He lay back in his chair, relaxed and oblivious. For a while his individuality, that ever restless symbol of differentiation, had ceased to register. He was at one with the elemental rush of water from the sky.

The shower ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and only gurgling voices survived in the darkness. Blunt listened, conscious of the rise and fall of their cadences. Slowly he remembered himself, and the woman who had come to live under his roof and all the problems that had filled his mind half an hour previously. But now they had sunk into the distance and seemed remotely insignificant. The

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## IN THE DARKNESS

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moon came out from behind dispersing clouds. Far into the night, Blunt sat watching the pale lights and dark shadows alternate and replace one another on the moving surface of the sea.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE MAGIC CROSS

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#### I

**A**T the end of her first week at Matana, Eva Dixon had made many changes within the house. Even from the outside it seemed to bear a different character. Blunt could hardly recognize the now transformed rooms, as the comfortless bare places in which he had lived. But with the house Eva's influence came abruptly to an end. The jungle grass and the listless puffs of wind that swayed it remained always the same, and if upon one small foothold she had printed her European standards, Matana with its recurring phases of gloom and blazing sunlight had touched her with a revelation of its wide-eyed and sudden magic. Already she experienced times of restlessness. She was disappointed that the natives were still estranged.

On the day after her arrival she knew that Blunt had interviewed the chief men. He had not repeated what he had said, but she noticed that they avoided

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## THE MAGIC CROSS

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the house. Koro-Koro and the others who were employed as house-boys were shy and reticent. Intercourse was difficult as she could not speak nor understand their language, and when she attempted to make herself understood by smiles and gestures, they made no response, but slunk away on the earliest occasion. Several times she had tried to talk to Blunt about the natives. He had been reticent, and had repeated that for a time she had better avoid them. He himself was puzzled and did not admit how little he understood what was passing in their minds. It was difficult for him to say where the difference lay. The work on the plantation and at the drying screens continued as usual, but he felt that there *was* a difference. He began as usual to ask himself questions. How much was it produced by changes taking place in himself? How much were the natives changed towards him on account of his new manner of life? . . . Then he would dismiss as vain, such speculations, with the thought that it didn't matter either way. He was at any rate capable of maintaining his position.

With Eva Dixon he had found other subjects of conversation. With growing interest he was entering upon a new phase of life. It was increasingly easy, when his day's work was over, to put aside any thoughts which did not directly contribute to the uncertain complex of emotion which constituted his new adventure.

Throughout the following days, Blunt watched

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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with all the acuteness of a sensitive observer the influence of the tropical jungle upon his new companion. But as he watched he began to accuse himself of a monstrous callousness. How could he expect a civilised woman to *live* in such a place? He felt convinced even at the end of the first day that she would never enter into the spirit of Matana as he had done. She would remain a foreigner in a foreign land. He even questioned whether she could survive in conflict with the forces of the place. As a subconscious result of these speculations, he suggested on the evening of the second day that he should take her out on the lagoon in a canoe.

They started from the river's mouth, and as the boat shot out into the open lagoon beyond the mangrove thicket, he had shared Eva's thrill of delight at the beauty of the tropical evening. After a moment's pause, as the boat floated into clear water, he struck out towards the fringing reef and then skirted the land at about half a mile's distance.

She told him how glad she was to be at sea again, and seemed to open out under the wide dome of sky like a flower in the sun's rays.

"Yes, I can understand the feeling," said Blunt, "I feel it too when I've had a long spell on land. In fact, I don't think I could live here if I couldn't get away to sea sometimes."

He turned and pointed down the coast. "Do you see that high headland yonder? That is

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## THE MAGIC CROSS

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Nathamaki where Matherson lives. He has built himself a little chapel high up on the hill. There is a marvellous view from there."

"It looks a long way off."

"It's within a day's ride through the jungle. I expect we'll have Matherson over to pay us a visit before very long."

"What is he like?" she asked.

"Oh! he's a good fellow, tremendously in earnest. We haven't got a great deal in common, but we get on very well together. I started with rather a prejudice against missionaries, and I've never quite got over it, though Matherson is one of the better sort." Blunt watched his companion closely. He felt sure that she had great sympathy with missionaries, and wanted to draw her. She did not speak nor even look up. "We are very good friends now, but at first we quarrelled because I wouldn't help him to Christianise the natives at Matana. I told him I thought Christianity did them more harm than good. Besides, I really prefer them as they are. One knows more where one is with an un-spoiled pagan."

She now looked up at him and said simply, "The message that Christ came to deliver is to all men. No one is excluded."

He was a little taken back. Yes, of course, she was religious, he had known that from the first.

"That's an open question," he answered. "None of these savages know in the least what Matherson

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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is talking about. They are not ready for it. All that the missionaries do on this coast is to destroy what religion the natives already have, and leave nothing in its place."

"Do you call their idol-worship religion?"

"Yes, it's a real religious expression, with true piety in it too. If you knew them you couldn't help recognising that." He was glad that here was a subject on which he could challenge her and have with him the weight of his sincere conviction. He admired the flush of excitement on her cheek and liked her better for her opposition. "These savages," he continued, "though they may be blind and inarticulate in ways where we can see and speak, are very honest. What they comprehend they comprehend thoroughly. Their sincere and yet imaginative interpretation of life is their religion."

"Have they not among them magicians and devil-worshippers?"

"They might be called that, and certainly they recognise evil spirits. If you live at Matana for long you will be forced to admit that there are such things."

"The devil manifests himself through their ignorance and superstition," she said, looking away over the sea.

"Here in Korobello there is a special variety of devil for every locality and sometimes two or three," he said, smiling. "And," he added, "I wouldn't have these people changed for anything. That's

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## THE MAGIC CROSS

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where Matherson and I disagree." Blunt felt inclined to force his point. He wanted to be quite sure that there should be no misunderstanding about the natives at Matana. "We have come to a kind of temporary compromise. Matherson has more work than he can do at Nathamaki and along the coast, so he has agreed to leave Matana alone. Not that he'd ever be able to make any impression here. They are too pious and orthodox for modern heresies," he said with a touch of cynicism.

For a moment Eva looked at him bewildered, then quite simply she asked, "Are you an atheist?"

"I wouldn't call myself such."

"But you are anti-Christian?"

He paused before he answered. "I look upon Christianity as one of the religions of the world, and one which these natives are not ready for. Quite possibly it may be the right thing for certain Europeans."

"But you yourself?"

"Yes, I suppose I am partially anti-Christian. Christianity founds its teaching on a denial; and I have always wanted to accept life."

"There is divine as well as material life."

Blunt mused for a little. What a conversation after eight years of silence. "Yes, and they flatly seem to contradict one another, so I suppose they are both indispensable to existence. The positive and negative poles being in fact the very conditions for existence. Then I should like to accept both."

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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She shook her head and then she laughed. " You talk as if you yourself were outside life watching it like some pagan God." Then since he did not answer, she asked with a changed mood and seriously, " How is it possible to live without faith ? "

" There are different kinds of faith."

" But only one kind of Salvation."

He laughed good-humouredly. " It's a pleasant change," he said, " drifting about here on the lagoon and talking of our religious differences. It's better talking to a friend than always talking to oneself. One doesn't get so submerged."

" That's true," she said after a pause, and smiled.

" We must help each other to keep near the surface."

He was surprised that she should so quickly guess his meaning. He laughed but didn't answer directly. " Look, we shall be caught in the darkness before we are back," he said, and turned the canoe towards the river's mouth. He had an impulse to land on the beach and take her back through the plantation, that she might hear the voices, but shrank from imposing upon her that ordeal. Poor woman, life would be difficult enough for her at Matana. He had better land at the river mouth and go back past the native village.

As they made their way through the jungle scrub up towards the house, he was vividly conscious that they were being watched by many unseen pairs of eyes.

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## THE MAGIC CROSS

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### II

It was early afternoon about a week after Eva's arrival that Ebu made her entry into the house. Koro-Koro had just started down to the plantation with Blunt's midday meal. Eva was preparing her own lunch and was alone.

Ebu entered the passage without being observed. She carried a heavy digging stick, and her hair was tied into a small compact knot at the back of her head. She entered silently and moved swiftly towards the white woman, who did not notice her presence till she was half across the room. Then she paused, and the two women looked at each other. For a moment there was a silence, then Ebu began a tirade of fiercely whispered invective. Her face became convulsed with hatred. In a moment large beads of sweat had gathered upon her forehead. As she spoke her fury increased, then when it seemed to have reached the limit of control, she advanced, lifting her stick for the deadly thrust against the breast bone of her victim.

The white woman retreated a step in horror before such show of implacable hatred. Her hands clutched instinctively at her breast, and then fastened upon the little silver cross that hung about her neck. She could see the passion of murder written clearly on the face of her unknown assailant. She gave herself up as lost. To defend herself did not seem possible. She believed that the moment

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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of her death had come. Instinctively she stretched out her hands against the blow. It was not in her nature to scream, but rather to wait mutely, and in that moment of suspense she prayed. It was a wild unreasoning prayer, and she could not afterward recollect its purport. She only remembered that she had prayed.

She had shut her eyes believing that death was upon her. Then, after what seemed an infinite pause, she felt that she was swaying and that her hands were still outstretched. She opened her eyes and put out one hand for support. In the other she still clutched tightly the silver cross. Ebu had dropped the digging stick, her face was convulsed no longer with the passion of slaying but now of fear. She had stepped back, and her face was grey-black with extreme terror. She made strange signs shaking her head and stamping with her left foot. Then, uttering a short, grunting scream she turned and fled.

Eva was alone. Her knees were knocking together; she felt that she must sit down or she would fall. For a while she sat still, struggling with a desire to weep, which at last she mastered. Then she knelt down and prayed. She had been saved by a miracle; God's hand had been interposed to save her.

Ebu had fled in terror back to the village where she told the story of the encounter. She had gone up to the house to kill the white woman who had

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stolen her man. She had found her alone, and had raised her stick to deal the death blow. The white woman was a magician ; instead of trying to defend herself she had made a strong magic ; she had held in front of her a small white magic-stick ; she had closed her eyes and uttered a spell. It was a strong magic and evil, for Ebu had felt the strength go from her arm, her heart had become as water, and she had fled.

The women listened in excited crowds, even the older men came to listen. Each man and woman of them from the hour of their earliest initiation had feared magic. They feared it far more than they feared death. There was no doubt in their minds that the white woman with her muttering and her swaying had invoked some strong spirit to defend her. Ebu told them how, in spite of her terror, she had not forgotten to make the counter-signs that ward off even a strong witchcraft. But she still feared the silver magic-stick. It was similar to the one carried by the white medicine man and no doubt had great power.

Pinjaroo came and questioned her. He spoke little but listened to all that was said.

### III

Close in front of the window was a creeper whose stems, twisting spirally about each other, formed a rigid three-ply rope. In places it was hidden by clusters of broad leaves whose surfaces bent out-

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ward tapering to points. White, asymmetrical flowers, nearly as large as the leaves, appeared here and there among the thicker clusters.

Eva stood by the window, her eyes resting on the rope of stems, on the black foliage and on the white flowers.

Rain, from a recent shower, had left a film of moisture which slowly formed into drops, heavy and pendulous at the apex of each leaf. On the white petals water stood in beads which, as a faint wind stirred the creeper, caught and reflected the sunlight. The drops gathered and fell from one leaf-surface to another. Out in the open a steam of heat rose from the jungle grasses. A blue, metallic fly alighted on one of the flowers. It lifted its wings in short jerks.

As Eva stood by the window, her eyes rested on these sights, but her mental vision was far away ; it envisaged rather the religious imaginings of her childhood. She was living in a world of rapture, and was kindled by joyous excitement. From time to time her lips moved and she touched the cross about her neck. To her had been vouchsafed a direct proof of divine guardianship. She could not doubt that for her sake a miracle had happened. Yet how great was her humility. She had been defenceless and alone, but the power of the cross had saved her. Happiness rose in her heart upon the tide of a boundless sea. Her thoughts wandered in a maze of happiness, returning always to the

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central consciousness of divine power. Dimly she was aware of the flowers and the blue leaves and of the jungle, but she did not consciously see them. But slowly, half-reluctantly her thought rose to the cognisance of superficial life. She thought of Blunt, and what would be his apprehension of her danger. But now—that was all unnecessary. Was she not specially protected by God? Should she seek the protection of a man? She smiled in her security. There was everything to be gained by silence and nothing to be lost. If she were to tell him, he might feel it his duty to make some material retaliation against the native woman. How much simpler it was to be silent. Besides, she had a dread of another treading with sceptic's feet the holy ground of her deliverance. She smiled at the pleasure of her secret pride; but with that feeling of pleasure, the serene aloofness of her religious ecstasy diminished.

Her thoughts wandered to Blunt, to his philosophic agnosticism; she wondered about Matherson and about the natives. Why had that woman wanted to kill her? Then, with a shock, consciousness of bodily life returned. She saw for the first time the objects upon which her eyes were resting. The water gathered upon the points of the black leaves, hung in swelling drops and fell. The sunlight was hard and sharp. The moist heat from the grass was wafted past the window, and on the large white petals of that unfamiliar flower a fly made darting and irregular movements. Its wings jerked up

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and down, and in the expression of its outstretched antennæ there was something hungry and ruthless. For a while she watched fascinated by its vivid and burning life. Was God manifested in anything so fierce and mechanical? Was this also a work of His hands? She looked away at the jungle, at the great trees, the countless stems intertwined and struggling together, at the broad leaves shining with water, at the brilliant sunlight, the steaming jungle grass.

She was aware that her heart had begun to beat fast; she shivered; tingling, strange sensations were running over her skin, they were piercing deep into her body. Quickly she turned back into the room. Here were familiar sights—tables and chairs: objects familiar from childhood; yet her heart was still beating unaccountably fast. Her hand felt for the silver cross. She breathed deeply and slowly—the beating of her heart became regular. She did not return to the window nor look out upon the disturbing brilliance of Matana. Her thoughts communed with themselves; it was not without reason that the old theologians had believed in a devil who had fallen from the right hand of the throne of God.

IV

Throughout the working days that Blunt spent among the natives in the plantation or on the shore, there were frequent occasions of solitude when his

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imagination strayed back to the house and to the Englishwoman who so strangely had come in response to a half-defined wish. He created diverse pictures of the relation which was to grow between them. He would smile at himself for his imaginings ; yet—it was a pleasant occupation. And then his old picture of life as something comic and grotesque which had to be got through with patience and without too much fuss, would make him turn back to the matter in hand with a feeling of freedom in his accustomed scepticism. But again his thoughts would wander. It was strange that she should have come fresh and living out of the substance of the old world and the old faith, which for so long had seemed both in mental and spiritual constitution to be as chaff dried up and withered.

At first his imaginings had been crude with bare outlines, later they became more subtle and difficult in the drawing. They developed each day into pictures more intangible and interesting ; yet he would view them, put them aside, and re-create them to his fancy. But upon the evening of his return after her adventure, he became conscious of a change. Instead of playing at possible contingencies, his imagination was itself affected ; it became molten with wide and sudden illumination. Was it that she had grown in grace during his absence, or had his eyes been opened ? The women of his past fancies had paled, they appeared now as puppets. The thick medium of which he had

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been so conscious, and which had hidden her personality, had fallen away. In her eyes he read a pious humility, but in the turn of her head the pride of life—an arrogant, wild pride, and in the fullness of her throat a sensuous, sweet mystery. He had felt abashed as he had entered, and had spoken about the simple, everyday affairs of existence. They talked about his day's work, and she made no allusion to her adventure.

As was usual, after the meal, they took their chairs out on to the verandah. When they had been talking for a little while, she remarked, "After eight years this view must seem very familiar to you, or does it still have an element of strangeness?"

"I always find it extraordinarily new," he answered, "it never grows familiar. I have sat here for hours and hours talking with Matherson and sometimes with the natives, and sometimes just talking to myself, and now it seems strange to be talking to you."

"What was it made you leave England?" she asked after a short pause.

"Discontent."

He noticed a slight smile on her lips. "Does that seem *strange* to you?"

"No."

"Yet you have not been discontented?"

She shook her head, "I am wonderfully contented."

As he regarded her, he could not doubt that she

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had found contentment, but how near akin was it to resignation? He felt a momentary envy, which gave place to a flash of antagonism. No, it was not resignation. His antagonism waxed. He had a longing that she should step down into life, and feel the hot pulse of its need, of its desire. Then, as he looked at her, his antagonism melted and he felt confident. She could not choose but live. Here in the jungle life was the tyrant of all its children. No one could withstand its power; he had but to wait. He caught the assurance of her eyes, and half hoped that she might withstand that tyranny. Life? Was it not always destroying itself? devouring its own substance? Could there be something apart from life which was eternal? When he spoke, it was with a touch of irony. "I have always envied people who were contented. It must be very pleasant and very comfortable to believe in an all-directing and all-loving God. I have tried to do so but have never succeeded."

"It is not difficult."

"No? How do you do it?"

She was silent a few moments. "Faith itself is perhaps one of God's most precious gifts. Yet it is so easy to believe. Why should I choose poverty when riches are offered?"

"I cannot believe in that sort of God."

"Why not?"

"Because—I don't know. I'm made differently. When I was a boy He always seemed to hide in

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Sunday schools and churches and he fed upon false worship. I have felt that the very name of God was saturated with false worship ; and, later on, I have not believed, because belief has seemed to me irrelevant and contrary to experience. I have seen existence as a balance between contradictions, a meeting-place of disharmonies. It is *because of* and through that contradiction that life is. As soon as there is an approach to harmony, a universal spirit of oneness, or whatever it may be called, then life falls placid and limp. Where there is a God there is no life, and vice versa."

She was silent, trying to understand his thought. "I have sometimes," he continued, "been able to get a glimpse of a negative, non-existent kind of a god who lives in nothing. Once in the north I saw bare open snow-fields miles and miles of them, and then, when the veil of life seemed to be withdrawn, I could fancy that God breathed in the silence."

"It is simpler than that. You are much too clever," she said, smiling. "Truth has been divinely revealed, we have but to accept the revelation."

He shook his head. "I will accept no revelations that do not come to me myself."

The moonlight, which lit gently upon the jungle, bathing it in silver and grey, fell in hard lights on the verandah, making contrasting shadows. A grey luminousness was reflected off the boards, and the faces and expressions of Blunt and his companion were easily visible to one another. Eva looked up

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as if about to speak, then hesitated. There was a slight smile on her lips.

"No, it's not so much a question of revelation, but of a different faith," Blunt continued. "I, too, have had revelations of a sort, and plenty of them. I expect we each find what we look for. And also," he smiled at her, "we sometimes find what we have not looked for. And miracles happen too," he added quickly. "It seems to me a miracle that you should come to live at Matana."

At that moment seeing her then so distant from him and yet, in her physical body, so close, the full piquancy of their relation became clothed in all that strangeness of which he spoke. On a sudden impulse he leant forward toward her; if he could touch her hand she might become more real and he would be able to speak. For why indeed had she come? She must know that according to all the standards of the civilised world she must marry him. And their days that they had spent together were the very substance of unreality. Was he not under some enchantment? And did not the soft magical moonlight and all the potential strength of the tropical night urge him to break the spell?

As he moved towards her, she lifted her head with a quick jerk and sat upright in her chair. At that very moment the air was cut with a sharp sound, and something flew between them. The boards of the house resounded with a clear pang as the head of a spear buried itself in the wood, and the

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long slender shaft vibrated a few inches from their faces.

Blunt leapt to his feet. "Get inside," he said quietly, then turning towards the jungle faced for a moment the gently stirring leaves and the soft veil of moonlight. He threw some angry imprecation in native dialect against the impenetrable silence, then again in English to the woman, "Go quickly, it was meant for you. Another is sure to follow."

Eva Dixon had also risen. The sudden excitement had struck the central chord of her being which vibrated in response like the thrown shaft of the spear. She lifted the cross and chain from her neck, and then stepped deliberately into the moonlight.

"Now you shall see and believe," she said; and she held up the cross in defiance of all evil spirits that lurked in the jungle.

There was silence, not a sound but the faint rustle of the leaves. The seconds passed, she was radiant in her triumph, keyed to the keenest pitch of excitement, exultant in her victory, glowing in the warmth of her faith.

In the first shock of surprise, Blunt had stepped forward to lay hands on her and carry her out of danger, but he had been arrested by the deliberate coolness of her act.

Reason or fine judgment played no part in that night's adventure. Impulses had governed, and

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in those tense seconds the forces of personality had swayed, balanced, and found equilibrium. If in such a mood of high courage, if stirred by such madness she wished to invoke death, he had no power to interfere. He stood a mute spectator. Then as the moments passed and she remained unscathed, he realised that she had done the one inevitably right thing. She burned under the spell of her enthusiasm. Her personality like a white strong flame had leapt up in unflinching affirmation of her faith. And now?—Oh, yes, she was safe. Safe from everything? And then as he pondered there mingled with his admiration a small acid grain of mockery. A heroic posture must not be held for over long. His laugh broke the silence.

“ You are magnificent,” he said.

She flushed and lowered the cross, though she still held it in her hand. Her eyes as they met his were indignant. “ Do you not believe now? ”

“ I believe in you a thousand times. How could I help it? And no doubt you have put the fear of the devil into the fellow, whoever he may be.”

“ You still doubt. Can you not see that the cross has saved us? ”

“ I believe for the time anything you bid me believe. You are magnificent.”

“ Oh, you are blind, wilfully blind,” she clenched her fists in rage at his opposition. “ Can you believe in nothing? Can you not see the power of God when it is so plainly manifested? And this is not

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the first time. No ! " Her excitement blazed at him. " I had not meant to tell you, but now it can do no harm ; now that you know that I am not afraid and do not look for *your* protection. To-day, this afternoon, I was here, alone, in the room, when a woman came to kill me. I was defenceless. She was burning with hatred and malice ; she raised her club to strike. I gave up my life as lost. I believed that I was to be killed, yet in that extremity I prayed. Instinctively I had clutched at the cross, and without any deliberate purpose I held it up against the blow. A miracle was vouchsafed, and I knew that God had me in His keeping. It was the black woman who came to kill me who was afraid. She fled in terror."

Blunt frowned. " What, a woman came into the house to kill you ? Was she a young woman ? "

" Yes."

" And she raised her stick against you ? "

" Yes, to strike me here on the breast."

" And your holding up the cross saved you ? "

" Yes ; do you believe now ? "

" I believe what you tell me." He paused and walked back across the verandah and wrenched out the spear. " Just as I believe that this spear was thrown by some one who meant mischief." Again he was silent, prodding at the boards with the spear-head. " Let us sit down again, we can sit here in safety. No further attack upon you will be made to night."

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"I hardly need your assurance of safety."

"No, perhaps not. . . . I have things that I must tell you ; that perhaps I should have told you before. You must think of me what you must. But I will ask you not to speak till I have told you all."

Eva moved to the chair. She had no dread of what he might say. She wished for him to speak.

Blunt waited a moment. A faint breath of air and a scent of damp vegetation came from the forest, fanned their faces, and passed by.

"During the years that I have lived here, I have taken to me native girls from the village to live with me." He spoke coldly without expression. "It is the custom of white traders to live with native women, and is considered a necessity. I have followed the custom, though not quite in the usual spirit. Most men take the women for their own convenience, and adapt them, so far as they are adaptable, to their own manner of life. I had a different motive. I have been attracted for as long as I can remember to wild unpeopled places ; as a boy I dreamed of them, and as a man I came to find them. In living with the native girls, I took them that they might lead me nearer to the heart of the wilderness from where they had sprung. Perhaps you will hardly understand me, but in them I divined some essence of the primal religion of primitive man. I sought in their bodies the symbol and spirit of these tropical forests. By embracing them I came nearer to the soul of the

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jungle." Blunt paused and looked for a moment over the palm trees out towards the sea. " Yet it eluded me ; or rather I only touched it at moments, and then as it were by accident. I was not satisfied because I was always a spectator of my own actions. How could I be satisfied ? And so in a way I drifted. I used the women for what they could give me, and when they had lost those qualities which I could believe were symbols of that which I desired, I sent them away and took other younger girls. But in all this I failed. I remained a white man and a spectator, life never carried me away."

Again Blunt paused. Eva was looking at her hands. She did not speak.

" One woman lived here for longer than the others. She possessed a certain strength and animal agility, an uncouthness which I had recognised in other and stronger manifestations, in the flowing of deep water, in the rank stems of grasses and even in the odour of damp leaves. She lived here with me till a month ago ; I sent her away when I heard you were coming. It was no doubt she who came to kill you.

" Let me finish ; this is a strange history, but stranger things happen than one can ever imagine. I must tell you about Matherson. Of course you know he is a Christian and a missionary. My actions seemed to him sinful, to savour of damnation and all that. To me they were at the worst futile and rather meaningless. Well, he used to talk to me

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on the subject of my morals. At one time we talked for hours daily. At first it amused me to have some one to argue with, and later I became very fond of him. I respect his opinions, though I go my own way. . . . No, that is not true. He has brought about a great change in my life. He persuaded me to write that letter which my sister handed to you. Why I did it I don't quite know. Partly because I was ill, because I was dissatisfied. I never believed it would be answered. To have a white woman here was quite contrary to my original scheme. But I have changed.

"When I heard you were coming, my ideas remained very crude. Of course you would have to marry me, and I believed that you also would have realised that. I foresaw none of this difficulty with the natives. I foresaw, in fact, very little." Blunt hesitated, then, having come near to the heart of his discourse, shied at it, and went off on another line.

"Of course you do not understand the natives as I do, and I do not understand your beliefs. You think miracles have happened to save you. I see them in another light." Again he broke off. "Don't think I don't reproach myself for the danger to which I have exposed you. Don't think I don't curse myself for my brutality. But as we are now situated, the least I can do is to be honest. I respect your beliefs though I cannot pretend to share them. I see what has happened in another light. The natives

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are great believers in magic. They have magic sticks, little pieces of carved wood which they point at each other to avert or to cause evil. They fear magic more than they fear death. It is their religion. No doubt they recognise the religious impulse in you, and believe you to be a stronger wielder of magic. Your confidence and courage would confirm them in that belief."

Eva looked at him. "My confidence and courage would be small enough were it not for the faith that gives them meaning."

Blunt nodded his head in acquiescence. For a while he did not speak.

"After what I have told you, do you find it quite repugnant to remain here?"

She did not hesitate over her answer, but spoke slowly as if weighing her words: "I have already told you of my motives, and of the forces greater than myself which prompted me to come. They are still the same."

"Then what I have told you makes no difference to your attitude towards me?"

"No essential difference. And I thank you for your sincerity."

"You mean by that?"

"That in these last few days I had formed my opinion of what sort of man you were."

"And the difference in our faith?"

"That is a big gulf."

For a long while they were silent. Blunt regarded

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her steadily, and as he saw her integrity and apparent composure, he wished that he might break down the calm surface of that defence. Then looking away into the dark vegetation and the moonlight, he mused. Again his eyes returned to the white face of his companion. Did she understand their position, or in what kind of dream was she living ? Why ? Why had she come ? Surely she troubled him. She was indeed unlike any of the women of his imaginings, though now his imagination warmed and shivered before her presence. He leant back in his chair and said dryly : "Would what I have told you make it impossible for you to marry me ? "

She shook her head. "No, not that. But I can't." She hesitated, then continued, "When I was in England and saw your letter, I knew that if I were to come I should be expected to marry you, whoever you might be, sooner or later. I accepted that obligation as part of what I was doing. But now I find I'm different from what I thought. I can't." She looked at him with what was real distress in her eyes. "I feel perhaps I should not have come."

"You find me physically repulsive to you ?" Blunt suggested.

"No, it's not that, indeed it's not. I only know that I'm different from what I thought I was. I beg you, oh, I beg you, to give me time to know—to know——"

"To know what ? "

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"Do not question me. Perhaps I have done wrong in coming, but I felt so irresistible a call."

"No, you have done right in coming, tremendously right. Of that I feel sure. Though where it will all end I can't think," he added with a laugh. "I, too, am different from what I thought."

And now, as he met her eyes, he saw that her reserve was broken ; there was a puzzled softness—his brain felt suddenly bewildered.

She said only one word. "Yes," but it seemed to flash with a vivid intent into the midst of all the bewilderment of his mind and fall burning into his heart.

"For the first time I don't quite see what's happening," he said dryly.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE MISSIONARY

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#### I

IT was more than a week later that Matherson rode over from Nathamaki. He had taken the direct path over the hills, but as he approached Matana, he heard shouts from the natives down on the beach, and so turned off towards the end of the long plantation where the drying-screens were situated. During the last months he had been hard at work. He had made an expedition to the head of the valley which ran back from Nathamaki, had come into touch with natives whom he had not before met, and had been wholly absorbed in trying to open their dim and furtive minds to the splendour of his own faith. Although his work had taken up most of his energies, he had often thought of Blunt, and had wondered how the new situation was developing at Matana. He expected that Blunt would be sure to marry his new housekeeper before very long. It was largely a question of allowing a decent interval; the shorter the better, he

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thought. He told himself that Blunt would be improved by marriage. With a wife to help give him a sense of responsibility, it was more easy for a white man to hold out against those dark and mysterious forces of the forest which manifested themselves in the pagan rites of unredeemed savages. With the help of a wife, the standards of a white man could be more easily maintained. He had known other traders who had taken white wives to share their lives in the jungle, and who had carried with them into the wildest parts the spirit and customs of Christian Europe. It was not natural, not right, Matherson believed, nor was it possible for a man to divorce himself from the conscience of his kind ; and most certainly a woman of his own class and colour would be the best means to bring Blunt back into line with established tradition. Not that he himself did not like Blunt for those very qualities of divergence which he now planned to modify. It was perhaps on account of those qualities that he felt more of personal friendship towards him than to any other man in Korobello. But Matherson, like the rest of humanity, must, under subjugation, feed upon and change those characteristics which offered him delight. On his neck also was the foot of necessity, which drives all men onward, irrespective of their inclinations, towards ends they know not of.

As he had followed the bush path, he had been dimly conscious of the responsibility that his action

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entailed. But then his whole life was so deeply burdened under the responsibilities of his calling that he could never for a moment have borne it, had he not learnt, long ago, to place it without question on the shoulders of one wiser and stronger than he. God was a mediator between himself and the results of his actions. Without his belief in God, life would indeed become an intricate business.

He found Blunt beside the copra sheds.

"Ah ! I have been expecting you for some days," said Blunt as he looked at his visitor whimsically. "You see, we are still alive, and the earth still goes round the sun."

"I would have come earlier," said Matherson, "but that I have been on an expedition into the interior."

"With your usual success ? "

"Not altogether unsuccessful."

They walked a little distance, and Matherson told of his expedition. They approached a line of natives ; each man was sitting opposite a short stake planted firmly in the ground, and at his side was a pile of cocoa-nuts. His work was to take the nuts, break them on the stake, and to fling the broken halves to another man who, with swift skilful scoops of a knife, cut out the white flesh.

When Matherson had told of his doings, the conversation came to an abrupt pause. He was expecting Blunt to speak, yet refrained from questioning. Blunt moved along the line of workers making

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remarks to the men, and Matherson walked beside him. At the end of the line stood Pinjaroo. He was not working on account of his swollen left arm, but was there by way of overseer. He looked moodily at Matherson as he approached, and as he passed, averted his glance, spat on the ground, and stamped with one foot.

The white men walked on toward the house.

"Did you notice that fellow?"

"Yes, what was he up to?"

"He thinks you've got the evil eye or something of that sort; that you'll make bad magic against him."

"But why?"

"Oh why!" Blunt dismissed the question with a contemptuous breath. "They are the same with Eva, only far worse. I simply daren't bring her down here. It would cause a mutiny."

"Eva?"

"Yes, I call her Eva and she calls me James, it's simpler."

"Then you mean?"

"No, I don't."

"Then what do you mean? Do explain yourself."

"Explain myself," said Blunt dryly. "I wish I could. It will take a cleverer man than you or I to explain this situation."

"At least tell me what has happened."

"A good deal has happened: but that is nothing

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to what is *happening*. You ought to tremble in your shoes and shake under your damned missionary's hat for what you've done." Blunt paused and smiled. "And yet I'm glad you've done it." He put out his hand against the stem of a palm tree and stopped, facing his friend. Matherson waited. "To begin with, she's an exceptional woman. She doesn't fit any of one's ready-made patterns of what housekeepers ought to be. Among other things she's religious, your brand of religion—a sort of fanatic. Already the natives have twice tried to kill her. One of the women I had living in the house came up with a big stick one day when I was out. You didn't think of that any more than I did—you clever fellow! The other time, some man threw a spear into the verandah at night."

"You don't mean it." The words fell inadequately from Matherson."

"Well, she just holds up a silver cross and puts the fear of the Lord or the devil into them. You can take your choice according as your colour is white or black as to whose power it is; it's that, together with the religious force that's in her, that's terrified them."

"When was this?"

"About ten days ago. I think now she's as safe as can be hoped or expected. From a few words I've overheard, they are afraid to lift their weapons against her. I can't get any of them to go up to the homestead. Even the home boys have

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deserted. It's all I can do to persuade any of them to work in the garden. That old savage stamping his foot was making a counter-magic against the cross you wear, which happens to be rather similar to hers."

Matherson remained in thought. "She does this deliberately? It's incredible!"

"No, at first it was an accident, an involuntary action—merely a stretching out of her hands against the blow. It was as close as that. But the second time it was deliberately performed with the most admirable courage—with the object (that was part of the motive, I think) of converting my scepticism."

"But—" again Matherson paused. Then, taking an easier question, "You really think her life is safe?"

"As safe as any of our lives—safer. But things change quickly from day to day. You and I are less safe here than when we last met."

"You are right, one must not consider such things too closely. If I had stopped to consider safety, I should have been dead long ago," said Matherson smiling.

Blunt smiled back at him ironically. "The whole situation is changed, and changed is a mild word to use."

"It's incredible," Matherson repeated; then, "May I talk to her?"

"Of course, as much as you like."

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" Is she alone up there ? "

" Yes."

" What, all the time you are away ? "

" What do you expect ? If I stayed with her the natives would interpret it as fear."

" But the situation is impossible. It cannot last. If the natives are as hostile as you say, she must not remain."

" You had better try and persuade her to leave."

" You don't think I shall succeed ? "

Blunt shook his head.

" But why does she want to stay in these awful conditions ? "

Blunt looked at his friend and laughed. " Oh, you imaginative man, and you a missionary. Hasn't she come all the way from England in answer to a 'call,' and is she to pack up at the first opposition ? I tell you she's got as much courage and conviction as you and I put together. And then there is this to be said : she doesn't realise, and I shan't let her realise if I can help it, how critical things are." For a few moments the two white men were silent, looking intently at one another. " They *are* critical," said Blunt quietly. " I don't know from hour to hour whether I shall be speared or not. If I relaxed one jot, I think I should be a dead man." He shrugged his shoulders. " Perhaps it isn't as bad as that ; they have known me for a long time, and have got accustomed to me. Besides, the things I give them improve their conditions. I shouldn't

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have lived here all these years if I hadn't been an advantage to them. I treat them as if nothing had happened. That's the only line to take. And we'd better not stay here talking for too long. They are getting inquisitive."

"No, no," said Matherson. "Certainly, if you think not. But before I see her. . . . Forgive my asking you. . . . I should like to know a little how you stand personally."

Blunt, who had been about to move on, checked, paused for a moment and said: "Yes, I may as well tell you. I asked her if she would marry me, and she said 'No.' She told me that she had meant to when she came out, but since then she had changed her mind."

Matherson frowned. "You didn't do anything? No, no, of course not. I beg your pardon. Dear, dear, it's all very puzzling; I never anticipated this. But you say she told you that she had anticipated perhaps marrying you when she came out?"

"Yes."

Matherson looked bewildered. "But surely? . . . Is there any reason?"

"She says—— But no, that's of no consequence." Blunt made a gesture. "We had better get moving. I'll walk across the plantation with you, then, if you go up to the house, I'll carry on with these fellows here for a bit."

"You asked her to marry you," Matherson persisted.

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"Yes."

"Blunt, you're a strange fellow; I find it more difficult than ever to understand you."

"I did not do so to satisfy the proprieties, or even to put your conscience at ease, my friend."

"No, I suppose not. But your original intention?"

"Was to live here alone undisturbed among the natives," said Blunt shortly. "Yet," he added, smiling, "against all prudence and common sense I'm glad that she's come."

"Then you don't blame me?" Matherson smiled.

"No, I'm grateful to you," said Blunt, as he turned away.

They walked slowly through the plantation, and passed the small wooden chapel that Matherson had built, which now was used for storing copra. "If only you could have helped me with my work," he said, looking regretfully at the building, "we should have had none of this difficulty."

Blunt shook his head, but said nothing. Then, after a pause: "That's true in a sense, in that I should have gone elsewhere. Can you not understand as a man and friend that the Christianising of the natives is to me positively distasteful? It's the very thing I want to get away from. You and I look at life from different sides, we can never see it the same colour."

"I know, I know, I didn't mean to imply any blame either—Well, I shall go up to the house.

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Later, with God's help, we may see the way clear before us."

They had now reached the entrance to the jungle-path where the missionary's horse was tethered. Blunt nodded to his friend. "I shall come up in about an hour's time." Then he turned back into the plantation. As he passed among the men he noticed that many distrustful glances were cast in Matherson's direction.

### II

As the figure of the missionary disappeared behind the long vivid leaves of banana plants, the man who was nearest to Pinjaroo paused in his work, and after regarding Pinjaroo's rather bloated and expressionless face for a few seconds, said : "For what reason does he come from Nathamaki ?" Pinjaroo looked at the man and grunted, then spat.

The man continued : "Surely he is without sense to live alone at Nathamaki. He makes no work among the palm trees, and lives without a woman."

"He has gone mad in the service of his devil." Pinjaroo shrugged his shoulders. "But it were better if he served his devil in his own country."

"Why does he come here ?"

"He is possessed of an evil spirit that drives him and gives him power. It is not good to look in his eyes. Once I did so and had pains in my

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belly all night. There is mana and bad magic in his eyes."

The man gave a nervous laugh and brought a nut down with a crash on the sharp stake. "If he comes here too much, we shall know what to do."

"Better be careful. Why, tell me, is he not with his own people? Did *they* not cast him out? How could they endure to look at him? Perhaps they had good reason in fearing to kill him. They feared his devil, and so cast him out. Now he wanders over the earth, always restless, and makes bad magic by the power of his devil."

"Is that indeed so?" said the man. Then, after a moment's thought: "In Nathamaki he has lived for many months, and has friends among the chiefs and among the people."

"His devil is powerful. He is evil, and will work harm to this people. At Nathamaki they are perhaps cautious; fearing to strike, they hope that in time he will die."

The man sat awhile motionless, letting the thought turn in his brain. "What of Tarfia?" he asked, speaking of Blunt by his native name.

Pinjaroo paused and considered before speaking. "Tarfia has lived for many years among our people. While he has been with us, he has brought good things from Tomanta. He has seemed our friend, and with the justice of our people we have treated him according to his acts. If he should now change

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—Pinjaroo looked away, then added meaningly, “he will still receive the justice of the people.” He took a quick step nearer, and, fixing the man’s eye, broke from his deliberate speech, and spoke with sudden passion. “This woman he has taken, she also is possessed of strong mana. An evil spirit is in her which took the strength from Ebu’s arm, making her as weak as a child. When I heard of her evil magic I knew that a new danger had come to our people. As you know, I took my spear and did not forget to perform ritual over it. I wished to kill the evil thing before its power should gather——” He broke off abruptly.

“Your spear was turned aside, but you threw only one.”

Pinjaroo’s face twitched with anger. “Her devil was too strong.” Then, with a sudden calm, he added, “I know well how to wait, but I shall not forget; and do you others know, that when Pinjaroo pauses, it is best to tread cautiously?”

The man nodded and made an inarticulate sound.

Pinjaroo looked towards the house. “Even now they talk together. They are slaves of the same spirit. They carry the same magic stick about their necks.”

The man shivered and spat. Then, looking across the plantations to where Blunt was walking, he said, “Tarfia remains among the people. He is returning this way.”

“He has eaten and drunk with evil ones and taken

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a sorceress to his house. He comes this way. I shall avoid him unless he seeks me out."

Pinjaroo turned and walked slowly down the line of workers. The man looked after his broad, fat shoulders as he departed. He sat for some moments motionless in deep thought. "The ways of white men are strange and always unreliable, and Pinjaroo? He was a strong man, powerful in the secrets of magic, having the good of the tribe in his keeping."

By the time that Blunt passed him, he was at work again, smashing the nuts and throwing the broken halves to one side. The spilt milk splashed up on to his arms, breast and face, drenching him in a sweet, pungent scent.

### III

The missionary paced slowly up and down the long room, while Eva Dixon sat by the window. "It is an extraordinary story, Miss Dixon, that you tell me."

Eva sat intently watching him.

"A most extraordinary story," he repeated.

"You believe in its truth?" she questioned eagerly. Matherson made a gesture. "How should I doubt what you tell me?"

"I did not question whether you doubted what I told you. I meant did you doubt God's truth so miraculously manifested for my protection?"

Matherson paused in his walk. "The power and

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wisdom of God are limitless ; His Spirit is everywhere, and will answer those who call upon Him truthfully."

"That is what I feel and *know*," she said with fervour.

In looking at the intense enthusiasm of her whole being which showed itself both in her expression and pose, Matherson understood something both of her loneliness, her need for sympathy, and the extreme daring of her venture. She was such a one as he had imagined, who had come in answer to God's whispered commandment, yet she was different. In her youthfulness there was frailty. As he regarded her he questioned the quality of her fervour. "Many people can profess that faith," he said, "but it is not so common to find it put to the test of practical proof."

"I did not seek the proof."

"No, certainly not. I did not mean to imply that."

Eva looked at him for a moment, paused and frowned ; "you have seen and talked with Mr. Blunt ?"

"Yes."

"He does not believe in God as I believe in God."

"No."

"He accounts for what happened by the superstition of the natives. He thinks that this offers an adequate explanation."

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She hesitated, not liking to put her doubt more definitely, dreading lest Matherson might give countenance to her opponent, yet craving his support.

Matherson understood both her youthfulness and her need, yet his sense for truth forbade him to narrow the wideness of his own experience. "I have lived among natives for a long time," he said as he continued his walk. "I know how full of superstition and the fear of magic they are. Blunt knows them well also. He sees things in a light natural to, and springing from, his own philosophy. It is not an unreasonable light."

"A reasonable one, he would call it."

"Yes."

Eva rose from her chair, her hands clenched at her sides. How much she needed to hold her faith, how its warmth glowed in her. It was her being; she had drawn down a ray direct. In its light, could not her courage become sublime to withstand the extreme hazard of this daring?

"I can see that you sympathise with his point of view more than you do with mine."

Matherson turned half-way upon his heel and faced her. He spoke slowly, equally aware of her need of sympathy and of their mutual need for the cleanest sincerity. "I can see that there are two interpretations of one fact. To many divine ordinances there are shown naturalistic interpretations."

For a moment Eva turned away with a quick

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gesture. He doubted her ; how could she tolerate such evasion ? He had no right, this man of her own creed, to see with the eyes of unfaith ; to doubt . . . There were many weak ones, lukewarm ones within the fold. Her inexperience of life, and her pain kindled a flame of annoyance. She turned with an impetuous anger as if the words broke from her. "I would doubt the strength of your faith under provocation."

"Provocation, what do you mean ? "

"A martyr's death ; the stake, torture."

There was silence while they looked at each other. Matherson met her glance with the ardent, yet well-tried fervour of his faith. If indeed she had come in answer to a call, God had laid His hand heavily upon her. She was his sister, and in need of his help. In his heart there was no room for personal affront ; it filled rather with tenderness. No sacrifice save that of sincerity would be too great to show the humbleness and simplicity of his humanity. "We none of us know our strength till it is tested," he said simply ; "still I have little fear of bodily evil. I have withstood the assaults of a more dangerous enemy."

"What do you mean ? "

"The impulse towards, what Blunt would call, life : The restless, heedless Goddess, cruel to her children and even to herself, demanding torture and death of all who bend their necks under her yoke, whose wages are ashes and corruption."

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"Yes." The word came in a half breath.

"But whose alluring beauty has been worshipped in the pagan world for ten times two thousand years."

"Oh!"

"That is the greatest danger, over which, by the help of God, I have so far gained the victory."

Eva's eyes had filled with sudden tears. "Forgive me the sin of my pride. I had no right. I was made blind." She covered her face with her hands, then, fearing that he would speak further of that danger which lay closest to her heart, she looked at him again. "No, do not speak to me of it. You are right in what you say—and even here . . ." She paused while he watched her, puzzled, yet half divining her struggle. "No, I do not need your help," she said with a flash of resentment, shaking her head.

"You must ask God for help."

She nodded slowly, "Yes—yes."

Matherson smiled, and changing his tone, said as he moved towards the window, "Now, apart from these high adventures, tell me what you think of Matana?"

"I think something different every day. My opinion is always changing." She was grateful that he should have turned the conversation to a subject less personal. "At times I think it has the beauty of some quite unreal place, and at other times it appears stiff and ugly."

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"I know what you mean—but look there," he pointed out to sea. "See those clouds and the shadows they cast on the water. Did you ever see such a purple; and there in the lagoon, the green water. At the reef it turns to pale yellow, and near the land sinks into shades that are almost black. Yes, it's a wonderful place. But you must come and visit Nathamaki. It's different there, more blue and white with a wind off the open sea. This place is strange though, no place on the coast like it. It's not difficult to understand Blunt's attachment."

"No, I suppose not . . ." she mused as if half inclined to say more. "And here, as in all His works," Matherson continued, "you find God the great architect. His meaning will shine forth."

"I know, I know it should. But what most frightens me—perhaps you divine my thought—is that, in the jungle, amongst all this luxuriant and teeming life, I cannot find God, but rather some alien power. . . . Something terrible and, in its terror, alien to . . . the same as that alluring pagan life you spoke of just now. It is something, something that has both terror and beauty, and is ruthless in its unconcern for human aspiration."

Matherson shook his head. "I see Blunt has been talking to you."

"Yes, but I did not need him to voice what was already too painfully apparent."

"You are under the temptation and the fear that

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has come to Christians in all times. This terror and this beauty is but an illusion. If you can conquer it, a divine beauty and peace will grow in its place." He paused, then continued : "Here at Matana the illusions of this earthly life grow strong, so strong that they turn and grow even against themselves. Here at Matana they appear to our frail human senses, a concentration, as it were, of sensuous life. The natives have long ago recognised this quality, and you will have heard how in their superstition and ignorance they have clothed it with devils and spirits. But before those who carry the true light within, these illusions of darkness vanish and fade away."

Eva listened in silence. With what ardour did she believe in the power of that faith which should vanish all illusions.

"I must tell you also," Matherson continued, "that there is a tradition of physical danger associated with this place. It was this tradition that first attracted Blunt. He is an unbeliever, and absolutely clings to his unbelief, yet his courage and sincerity have been sufficient to banish that fable. Long ago some white men were killed here; there were a succession of murders. But that was long ago. Blunt has now made his position fairly secure. Don't think I say this to alarm you, but you must remember that there is always an element of danger. And though you yourself may now be immune," he smiled kindly and yet a little mock-

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ingly, "Blunt's position may not be absolutely secure. The natives need careful handling, and your advent here and the events of the last two weeks may have caused a little disturbance. I hope and fully expect it will all blow over, and all be for the best, but in the meanwhile, nothing demonstrative."

"Indeed no, believe me," she said abashed.

"And so far as treatment of the natives is concerned," Matherson continued, "I would advise you to follow Blunt implicitly. He knows these fellows far better than anyone."

"I will do so. But at first——"

"Yes?"

"At first I wanted so much to be friends. I felt that if I could just talk to them we could understand one another. But he wouldn't let me."

"Perhaps *then* you could have."

"You see—I didn't know then about those women——"

"He has certainly made things difficult," said Matherson, frowning. "And he allows me no influence with the natives. He likes them, in all their wild savagery. How then can he expect them to understand? . . ." He paused and then made a fresh start. "I admit the situation is difficult, and that your instinct towards friendship was in the first place right; but now, things being as they are, they would probably misunderstand any action that came from you; now you had better rely on Blunt's judgment."

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Eva shook her head and made as if to speak, then nodded in assent.

It was not long after this conversation that Blunt came from the plantation. As he walked along the jungle-path, he tried to recapture his old detached view-point, but was unable to do so. Yet this affair with the natives seemed only a small part of the complex that was so quickly overwhelming him. Each day different problems presented themselves for solution, and daily they followed one another like spokes of a revolving wheel. Only a short while ago the question as to whether he should marry Eva had seemed uppermost; now it had fallen away, and as his attraction and interest in her became more immediate it seemed, unaccountably, to sink yet further. Why that was, he could not tell, but he had no desire to discuss the question in any of its contingencies. And now, as he entered the house, he felt a mild inquisitiveness about the subjects of their conversation during this long interval. The religious question had probably held them. He smiled at their probable concern over his paganism.

But later, when they sat at their evening meal together, they talked of the affairs of everyday life, of the copra yield, and of prices in Tomanta, of Eva's impressions of the tropics and of Matherson's work at Nathamaki. Life seemed strangely, unexpectedly civilised. Yet, in spite of, or perhaps because of, this simplicity of outward behaviour, Blunt was

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aware of the strong undertone of their predestined fates drawing them silently over the unruffled surface. He glanced at the faces of his companions, contrasting their differences : Eva's wide brow and fair skin, the open assurance of her blue eyes, her confidence and her hope ; Matherson's tanned and wrinkled face, his sparse goaty beard, the burning enthusiasm of his eyes, and the lines of knowledge and pain upon his brow and mouth. He thought of the belief that these two held in common, in an all-powerful and protecting God, and as he looked from one to the other, he had a strange fancy that even now as they sat in friendly open discourse about the table, they were under the spell of the Naki ; Matana's dark shadow overarched them, and the smooth surface of the sea swept them forward toward the whirlpool.

Could he shake himself free of these fancies, or had he lived for too long a life of isolation ?

The next morning he accompanied Matherson down to the shore where his horse awaited him. After they had moved some little distance from the house, he asked : "What did she say when you suggested that she should go away ? "

"I did not suggest it," said Matherson. "I had meant to, and had got together my arguments, but I soon saw in what spirit she had come, and that she was not likely to be persuaded. She is a wonderful woman, Blunt." After a pause he added : "And I understand that there will be difficulties ;

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things will not be so simple as either of you imagined, but whatever pain and waiting may be involved, it will be worth while."

Blunt did not speak, but walked in silence to where a native boy was waiting uneasily with the missionary's horse. Then, as their hands met in a firm grasp, "I will send a runner if I want you for anything immediate."

"You may rely on me," said Matherson, retaining Blunt's hand for a moment in a grip of additional assurance. Then he mounted his horse and rode away.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### INVOCATION

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**F**OUR miles from the end of the plantation basalt hills descended steeply to the shore.

The black, shining surface of the rock offered only sparse root-hold to vegetation, so that the thorn bushes which clustered in the crevices made only occasional patches of green. Close at the base was a long shelf of dead coral which followed the line of the shore and stretched some hundred yards out to sea. At low tide this was just awash ; the ocean rollers breaking on the outer edge and running in over the flat surface, swirling in and out of the frequent coral pools. Here and there were creeks and long gullies in the basalt into which the waves squeezed and sucked. A level ledge not more than a couple of feet above the coral skirted one of the larger gullies. Upon this ledge Blunt and Eva stood watching a blow-hole, caused by the water having eaten its way beneath the rock. As the subterranean waves moved in rhythm with the rollers which crashed upon the edge of the reef,

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water shot up through the hole, and a mist of spray hung continually above it.

Blunt carried over his shoulder an empty sack and a large species of landing-net. "There are a fair number of these holes in this region," he said, "and I have noticed them in this kind of rock elsewhere."

"It seems strange that the sea should work so far underground."

"Yes, there is water under the rock where we are standing. If you listen you can hear it gurgle and suck. It's pleasantly cool here in the spray; shall we sit and wait till the tide is down?"

Eva made a sign of assent. "Do you see tiny rainbows that are constantly forming in the spray, melting away and reforming?"

"Yes. How does this place strike you?"

"It is wonderful."

"I like it too. I like sometimes to get away from the work. One can feel the sea here, though it is still shut off by the reef. But here it is very different from the enclosed valley of Matana."

"It is like another existence. Have you not often been here before?"

"Not very often. Once or twice I have been here with natives to catch lobsters and crayfish, just as we are going to catch them to-day. I prefer being here with you."

"It is better than anything I dreamed of in Europe," she said looking with animation at the

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bright light on the waves. "And just here it is so deliciously cool, even in the sun."

"Yes, the spray keeps the air cool." They sat for a while without speaking, watching the rollers gather, run forward, curl over, fall and break in spray, and then the tumultuous swirl of white water would race forward to be lost in a smooth current eddying beneath the rock. After a moment's interval a water-spout would shoot through the blow-hole and they would be enveloped in a haze of mist. "I am glad you like this place, but wait till we are out on the reef. We get a fine view of the coast to northward." After a pause he added, "I like to get away from Matana sometimes."

"I can well understand that."

"And since you've been here I like to get away more than ever. I look forward to these expeditions."

"You don't miss your solitude?"

"In a way I do, but I'm glad to miss it."

After a few moments' thought she asked, "Tell me, what has made you live for so long at Matana?"

"I like the surrounding country."

"But that can't be the real reason," she said smiling.

"A sound commercial instinct," he said. "It's very paying." Then, seeing that she was not yet satisfied, he added: "I suppose, too, it's partly

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conceit. I like to live where other men have failed. Besides, it has a quality that attracts me. You too must have felt that. Tell me, would you choose to live here?"

"I understand its attraction," she said slowly. "But I'd never have had the courage to come here on my own."

"But that's just what you did do."

"After your letter invited me."

He laughed as he looked at her. "Do you know that Matana has the reputation of working mystical changes. You already look quite a different person from when you came."

She laughed back at him. "Some of the European has worn off."

"I think it has. Your lobster-catching costume is hardly the vogue in London. . . . But I have forgotten that I ever was a European."

"Oh no, I don't think that you have."

He looked away at the rollers on the reef.

"It would be simpler if I could forget."

"But less interesting."

"Interesting?"

He turned to her sharply. Was she laughing at him?

She stood up and walked into the midst of the spray that the light breeze fanned into festoons and curtains. Thousands of small drops settled in her hair and on her face. "Why did you never bring me here before? This sea, this salt air, the

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sunlight and the wild coast. I did not know that the earth could be so beautiful."

" You like it ? "

" It transforms life."

" Better than Europe ? "

" Why look—yes—look at those black rocks up there, and behind them the purple of those imaginary fantastic mountains."

" So you are glad you came ? "

She nodded.

Blunt mused, looking at first at her spray-wet face, and later at the rhythmical onslaught of the rollers. The tropics were working their magic change. Life was touching her, life was changing her ; he had only to wait. The thought wrenched at his heart. And he himself ? He could not, as before, view his own actions ; but the sun, the open sea and sky, did not in vain mingle with his blood. . . . But what a fragile flower was life ! No, something more tender and delicate. A flower rooted upon a crumbling stone on a cliff's edge, that blossomed recklessly indifferent to the abyss. He turned his head and looked back along the way that they had come. She did not know what was happening at Matana. He had kept the ominous signs from her. How could she read them ? Since the first attempt upon her life, the natives had taken no definite action. Nothing had happened. Day after day had passed ; she had grown accustomed to the new life. She saw nothing of the natives. It was easy

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for her to forget. Yet he had the *feeling* that things were always happening—that something was always about to happen. He had no definite knowledge, nothing save that life continued from day to day. He *felt* the estrangement of the natives, and that their estrangement was growing to hostility. They did not treat him as they had done in the time previous to her arrival. He *felt* that they hated her. Yet the daily life continued with only this difference: that he and Eva took longer and more frequent expeditions into the adjoining country. At first he had taken only an evening hour on the lagoon or on the beach; now they thought it usual to be away for a long half-day. Again he looked back at the waves, and knew that he was glad—partly glad at any rate to leave that long loved valley where shadow and sunlight so magically mingled. With another wrench at his heart he questioned whether Matana had not turned against him. And yet—

“What are you thinking of that makes you look so serious?” she asked.

The slow, non-committal smile that he gave was one that she was familiar with. “If you stand in the spray much longer you will get quite wet through,” he said.

“I don’t mind, I like it. But what were you thinking of?”

“Of how much my life was changed since you came here.”

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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"Are you sorry?"

"No . . . but, Eva—— A change of that sort continues. It is in process. It doesn't stop. It cannot stand still. When I asked you to marry me, I asked you perhaps too soon ; but have you thought of the future ?"

She stepped out of the spray and came nearer to him. Her face, which still reflected the rapture of her enjoyment, was now serious, and her eyes had a look of entreaty.

"Yes, I have thought. But you must give me more time yet. I thought when I came here it would be simpler. I've guessed too what you must have been thinking of me. I know that I *ought* to marry you."

"You need not put it like that."

"It's true. But——"

"Yes."

"I thought I could do what I liked with myself. I find I cannot."

Blunt rose from the boulder where he had been sitting and stood beside her.

"There is something in me which I cannot name," she continued, then paused as if seeking for words. After a moment's vain search, she knew that she could not speak further of that nameless quality.

Blunt took her hand, lifted it, and held it gently in his palm. She made no response to his touch, neither did she withdraw, but stood silently beside him. For a while neither of them spoke.

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Blunt felt the fresh wetness of her hand, and knew that not yet could it close warmly upon his. Her face and hair were also wet with the sea spray. The sun and the warm wind bathed and enveloped her—and her thoughts? He could not tell where her thoughts were straying, but at that moment she seemed to have no artificial restraint placed upon either body or soul, but to stand simple and self-possessed in the right of life and youth. After a pause she said, “Do you see that calm water yonder—comparatively calm I mean; there where the breeze ruffles it, in that big pool?”

“Yes.”

“Do you see how it glitters? Well, if you watch you see the bright sparkles flash and disappear, and in amongst them, there seem to be little black dots as black as the others are bright?”

“Yes, that’s curious. I hadn’t noticed them before.”

“What are they?”

“I don’t know. Some trick of the eyes, I think. There’s nothing on that smooth water that could throw so black a shadow. And see, they are on the calmer water too, but not so many of them.”

“They are rather wonderful,” she mused. “One can never quite focus them, they seem always to be just where one isn’t looking.” She gently withdrew her hand, then turning to him, “James, be patient with me.”

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In her eyes he could read supplication, but together with her entreaty was the knowledge of that limitless power ingenerate in nature to which mankind in all ages and all times has raised altars of worship and sacrifice. He nodded to her, smiling. The sea beneath the rock sucked and gurgled, and through the blow-hole a fountain shot up, enveloping them both in fine salt spray.

### II

For a time, of which the falling and rising tide alone kept record, they had been catching crayfish in the pools of the reef's surface. They had waded in the shallow water, and when from under the rock ledges they had seen protruding long sensitive antennæ, they had planned and compassed the capture of their quarry. Eva would hold the net, and Blunt with a slender rod would persuade, with careful guidance, the crayfish to jump backward into the trap. They had collected some score or more in a sack, and now, satisfied with their capture had wandered apart looking for the large yellow and mauve cowrie-shells and for the sea-snails with red and green opercula. Eva felt that unexpectedly she had re-captured the happiness of childhood. Not since she had been a girl, and she and her sister had caught tadpoles and newts in the rectory pond, had she felt that free, irresponsible kind of

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happiness. Her companion had also seemed to her to be like a child. At his best a man would perhaps be always rather childlike; and now Blunt's serious concentration on the matter in hand, his pleasure at their captures, the appreciation of each other's dexterity or amusement at each other's failure, had all contributed towards an irreflective and childlike joy. Certainly he could be a charming companion for such an expedition. . . . And now she was wading knee-deep in water looking for cowries as if the search were really something of importance.

On looking round she saw that they were separated by about a quarter of a mile of swirling water. She straightened herself, and looked about her. She had been aware all the time of the crash and fall of the waves, but did not know that she had wandered so near to the seaward edge of the reef. She knew that there was no bodily danger, but in a flash the troubling and enigmatic beauty of the sea, as it broke and thundered at the reef's edge, sent a stab of fear to her heart. She stood looking at the turmoil of breaking waters, then as if troubled by its restlessness turned to look at the land.

About her knees was the swirling inrushing water. It raced landward three hundred yards distant and there made a thin rim of foam against a narrow foreshore. Above this, black basalt rose in terrace above terrace, up to where cataracts

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of vegetation poured down covering all but outstanding elbows of rock, which in a series of steps, led, one beyond the other, up towards distant escarpments. And behind the escarpments, behind forests of close-matted jungle, the mauve outline of hills met the deep blue of the sky.

This country, this land of Korobello was indeed possessed of a strange magic. Again she turned towards the sea. From where she stood the waves seemed to lift twenty feet higher than her head. They looked as if they must inevitably sweep her away. Thick and heavy, the green water gathered and rose, then feeling the hidden rock at its foot, bent forward, hung for a moment in suspense and fell. The white foam leapt up and the tumbling waters rushed towards her, at each yard's advance losing the wild fierceness of the open sea, becoming tamed by the touch of earth. It rushed by, swirling against her flesh in clear soft currents, its foam already dissolving to looped lines of bubbles.

Wave succeeded wave. They would follow one another until the end of time. Until the earth was washed away, and only the unbounded ocean would flow in rhythmical tides, following the moon and sun. Did that restless and recurring motion manifest the will of God? Her faith, all the tenets of her religion, her confidence and her conviction, how could they answer the challenge of this ever-moving water? In the seclusion of her English village, life had questioned more gently.

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Its whispered interrogations had fluttered by with the sweet scent of flowers on the evening air—— But this sea with its relentless insentient power—how could she answer that ?

Yet her faith was secure. She had it in her heart warm and close. Her humanity held it in safe keeping. But here and now, in the sublime presence of these gathering and falling waves did her humanity still exist ? Had she become emptied of the divine breath, or was it the waxing consciousness of God's omnipotence that now filled her ? She felt her blood pulsing quickly at her wrists and temples, and as her breath came faster, she felt a strange uplifting joy. Her body thrilled and trembled. She lived, as once or twice before she had lived, in an ecstasy of prayer, when the mystery which is God had overcome the restlessness of human consciousness. But this experience, though the same, was different. In this vision was the heart-shaking throb of life, the heart-breaking throb of life, the generator and destroyer. Dare she touch for a moment the reality behind the symbol, and behind the reality the great emptiness ? No. It was not for her to sink beneath the wave. She was rising up through the thick green water. She was lifted by the piercing happiness of life. She would ride the wave free in the sparkling sunshine beyond.

In a sudden consciousness of the light which fell on her and around on the water, she lifted her

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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hands in invocation. She prayed silently a prayer, different from any prayer she had known. It was a pledge rather than a prayer. She would accept, accept, accept everything, everything.

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## CHAPTER IX

### PRAYER

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WHEN they parted on the edge of the plantation, Eva began to walk along the path that wound its way amongst tufts of grass, up towards the belt of jungle which enclosed the house. Blunt, who always made a round of the drying-sheds every evening, and who usually visited the native village to receive reports, said that he would return as soon as his work was done. For a short distance Eva followed the path, but as she neared the place where it plunged into thick jungle, she felt a longing to be once more by the sea's edge. The novel and stirring quality of the mood which the ocean rollers had engendered still clung to and enfolded her. She turned and struck off towards the sea. Her way led through the widest part of the plantation. Underfoot was a short springy turf; on every side the slender stems, some straight, some twisted and bent, and others leaning at sharp angles, recurred in irregular

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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ranks one behind another into far distance ; overhead the huge, divided leaves curved in wide arches. A slight wind caused their silicious surfaces to rattle against one another. Apart from the stirring of the leaves there was no sound save the occasional thud of a nut as it dropped somewhere far away. The evening sun slanted among the palm stems, and Eva, as she walked from the sun-flecked plantation to the open beach, no longer felt the wild insistence of those ocean waves that gathered their green waters together, stood poised for a moment, rolled over and fell. There was serenity in the evening air. The waters of the lagoon seemed very still.

Yet upon the coral sand diminutive waves lapped. Smooth water stretched north and south in a belt of unbroken calm ; westward the sun dipped towards the horizon over a sea of pale green and gold. Eva looked at the little waves that broke at her feet, and mild and small as they were, she felt as she watched their rhythmical repetition, that they were of the same genesis as those others that fell crashing upon the rock. Life would demand an answer to its challenge. Here there was no escape —even here in the heavy quiet of evening, embedded as it were in crystal solitude between the semblance of the sea's ineffable clemency and groves of wind-whispering palm trees.

Two yellow tiger-sharks, swam lazily a few feet from the shore. Luxuriantly they rubbed their bellies against the sand, now and then turning over

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## PRAYER

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to scratch their sides and backs. Their fins which jutted above the water caused swirling ripples. Eva watched them as they passed.

These creatures also were made by God, she thought. How strange and unhuman they were. She turned and walked a little distance along the beach, in which brown streaks of broken shells mingled with the white coral débris. She now no longer questioned within herself ; it was enough to look from the changing colours of the sea's surface to the long ranks of feather-crowned palm-trees. . . .

How long she stayed by the shore she did not reckon, but in the tropics the sun sets quickly, and it was late twilight when she returned towards home. It would not be difficult, she thought, to find a way through the plantation, and so, not bothering to walk back to the path, she made a direct line for the house. In this region the plantation was nearly half a mile broad ; it was not long before the ranks of tree-stems closed round her, shutting out all sight of the shore.

The slight breeze, which had been blowing during the afternoon had now dropped. There was stillness under the long arching leaves, broken only by the occasional scuttling of a rat, and the curious rasping sounds made by the joints of the land-crabs as they scattered to and fro in the deepening gloom. After she had gone a little distance Eva paused, listening to the faint sounds. The awe and mystery

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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of the sea, which in the open of sky and sunlight she had so deeply felt, lived here also in this hushed secrecy of the trees. She could fancy that this also was like the sea, only it was some subaqueous region, and the darkness was caused by a blue weight of water above the tree-tops. The tree-trunks were the stems of giant sea-weeds whose tops swayed to and fro far under the ocean surface. As she listened to the faint sounds, there was suddenly a distant cry, harsh and fierce. A whine of persecuted hate answered. Then the first cry, louder, of rage and malice, sounded nearer. The other was flying before it, protesting—gibbering its hate and fear. The voices approached with incredible speed, they were rushing down upon her through the tree-tops.

Eva stood frozen with terror. Was it some wild beast approaching? Were not those sounds rather the utterance of evil spirits? . . . And now they were upon her. No, they had swerved aside. They were to the right, fitfully howling. Now on the left. Eva ran forward. The voices whispered and followed. Then in a flash of mingled hope and terror, she remembered her cross. She had forgotten. Ah! what had she not forgotten. She held up the cross, praying wildly. The voices howled close among the tree-tops. Her lips moved in despairing prayer. She had forgotten—forgotten. In that transport of life out upon the rocks by the sea's edge what had she not forgotten? She had been enchanted by its pagan, its entrancing beauty.

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## PRAYER

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She fell upon her knees, her hands clenched in prayer.

If it were God's will that she should be destroyed, then His will be done.

Then, at last, she knew that she could pray, and though her body still trembled she was strangely calm, she had no longer any terror. God's hand was over her ; what had she to fear ? The voices no longer called. The plantation was silent. In her humility she wept, and with her tears, prayers mingled. "God save her from being beguiled by the sensuous splendour of life. Christ help her to walk the narrow way of His salvation."

For a long while she knelt praying in the darkness ; the rats squeaked among the tree-tops and the land-crabs scuttled to and fro. They were God's creatures, and she did not fear them. Her faith was again made whole.

Then from the direction of the house she heard Blunt's shout. She remembered him with a sudden stab of pain. No doubt he was anxious, perhaps afraid that she had lost her way. She groaned, thinking how near she had been to losing her way indeed. But why that stab of pain ? She breathed a prayer. Then she stood up and answered his call. He called again, and she began to walk quickly towards the house.

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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### II

After he had made his round of the copra houses, Blunt walked towards the native village. It was his custom each evening to speak with those natives who, possessing tribal superiority over their fellows, acted as overseers on the plantation. In the past he would usually have sat down at the hut doors and have talked with both men and women, who at this time were preparing their evening meal. Often he would have stayed to share it. But lately his visits had been shorter, confined to the bare necessities of orders for to-morrow's work. On his side he would have gladly kept up his former intimacy, but any friendly advances that he made were now met with a sulky reticence. Distrust had grown between himself and the people. He knew its origin, and would often persuade himself with the hope that it might be dispelled, though how this was to come about he did not argue. In time they would surely get accustomed to Eva's presence. No, he could not believe that Eva's personality would never adapt itself to this enchanted and bedevilled land of fierce sunshine and storm. He wondered whether the changes in himself were of a permanent nature, whether he would ever again appreciate to the full that peculiar and most personal intimacy with the natives. It had been intrinsically a part of his solitude. And now that his conditions had changed (and there had been more

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## PRAYER

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change than that of mere condition), would he ever be able to recapture that careless freedom which he had shared with these primitive children of nature. The memory of that spontaneous concord came to him like the faint scent of flowers at twilight.

As he turned into the well-worn foot-path that led toward the village, he tried to reconcile the past with the present. They would not be reconciled. He saw how deep and far-reaching Matherson's influence had been. White or black, he must be one or the other. Matana allowed of no compromise.

As he was passing between walls of thickly leaved bushes which pressed close upon the path on either side, his attention was arrested by a strange repetitional sound as of a voice intoning. He checked, and listened. Yes, it was a human voice, voices rather, repeating a long monotonous prayer. It was unlike anything he had heard from the natives. After pausing for a few moments, he walked back to where a side path branched off in the direction of the sound. He moved cautiously, wishing to avoid observation.

The undergrowth grew very thickly, making it probable that his whereabouts would not be suspected. The sound continued in the same monotonous stream, broken only by short pauses, toward which the voices rose in harsh notes of indignation.

Blunt approached cautiously, and in the gathering twilight came suddenly upon two figures. In a

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small open space, only a few feet distant, Pinjaroo and Illagaroo, the two chief men of the tribe, were squatting upon their haunches. Their bodies were painted black with oil and soot, and on their trunks, arms and legs were streaks of red and ochreous pigment. Their foreheads, noses and cheek-bones were daubed with dead white clay. On their shoulders and hips were tufts of feathers, and on their heads frame-works of bent twigs, bound with string and plastered with clay and the small, red breast-feathers of parrots. In front of them, and stuck upright in the ground was the hollowed-out thigh-bone of a pig. Towards this bone they breathed the stream of their imprecation. Their faces were fixed in earnest absorption, for the most part immobile, but now and then a rapid grimace would precede a gesture; their hands flung out sideways, then brought together on the forehead.

The stream of words was so fast that Blunt could not distinguish its meaning, but he had little doubt that some kind of malediction was being uttered. He guessed that this was in some way connected with Eva's presence. But why, he questioned, that unoffending and harmless-looking bone. He was interested and amused, feeling at the same time contempt and pity; and yet some strong and illogical element of his mind wished that he might stop that necromantic rite. He had never before seen such an invocation of magic, never been so near to the heart of their religion. If he were

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## PRAYER

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to step forward he would, without doubt, bring wrath and quick vengeance upon himself. Yet this was but the mummery of children, and as he stood watching, all his old love of the natives rose warm in his heart. These wild, savage men had been his children. He had conquered their distrust by his unobtrusive fearlessness, and had become as one of themselves. He knew them both in their moods of fear and of hope, and understood too how it was that they feared Eva. In her they recognised a religious quality different from, and seemingly opposed to their own. He could see that their brows were set in a fixed frown ; and, as he watched, he could feel the full malevolence of their will projected towards the bone that stood white and upright in the ground.

Although he could not understand the general trend of the ritual there were many words that he could catch here and there. Long lists of food stuffs were succeeded by others of plants and trees, the same lists were later repeated. He stood listening till it was quite dark and the two squatting figures had faded from sight. Only the intermittent stream of sound persisted. He remained musing in the darkness. What significance had that intently uttered prayer ? It was a prayer, and these men were not only praying for themselves, but as representatives of the tribe. While he could smile at their simplicity in daubing themselves with coloured pigments, he recognised them for what they were, leaders

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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chosen on account of their strength or cunning : medicine men, priests, believed in and respected. Must not the intensity of that concentration produce an answer from that secret potency of which they and all their environment were but a part ? Did not all priests create the God they worshipped ; Devil or God, or that heedless changefulness which we call nature, the magic something, which like a breath of air passing over the sea's surface stirs it to motion ? By that sustained effort of concentration could they attain communion with the spirit which was themselves, yet was more than themselves, which was the tribe and more than the tribe, which was indeed Matana ?

Silently in the darkness, Blunt withdrew. He retraced his steps. As he walked towards the house, he tried to assure himself that the magic was no concern of his. It could not touch him, after all he was a white man. It was not likely that he should be afraid of mutterings in the dark. And as for Eva, he felt she was safe within the fast circle of her own faith.

When he reached the house, he found that it was still dark and empty. He hurriedly ran forward and mounted the verandah steps. What could have happened to Eva ? He hardly dared question. Anything might have happened. He lighted a lamp, and went from room to room, then he called quietly. There was no answer. In that suspense he knew how much of his life depended upon hers.

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## PRAYER

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His love had been steadily, silently growing, now it burst upon him with such force that his heart could scarcely beat for suffocating pain. For a few moments he whispered to himself in the silence, then lifted up his voice in a fierce desperate shout. It rang strangely through the night. He waited, breathing heavily in the enduring silence. It was with difficulty that he put away the desire of praying to a God in whom he no longer believed. From far away in the plantation came an answering call. He shouted again this time with a ring of exultation. She was safe and alive.

On his way to the plantation the path through the long grass led him near the village where he came upon several groups of natives. Their faces were lit up with the light of the lantern as he passed. They murmured together, gesticulated and pointed. Their senses were alert, and all directed towards the plantation. Blunt hurried past them. What mattered the ignorant superstition, or muttering of the medicine men, so long as she was safe and alive ?

### III

After Blunt had passed, the natives watched the lanthorn-light flicker behind trees and bushes, and at last disappear. One of the men turned to his companion. "Did you see how he stumbled in his haste ? he took no heed where he put his feet."

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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"He has become like a boy again. Truly such haste is unbecoming in a man."

The first speaker muttered to himself, then he said, "He is under the power of the she-devil. The magic she wields is strong."

"It is strong, but the power of the tribe is stronger."

"Who can tell? Since she has been here, the white master has become like a fool or a child, and who can tell from what powerful devil she draws her strength. Ebu's hand was stayed, and even the spear of Pinjaroo was turned aside."

"That is true. . . . And did you not hear how to-night the great spirits descended upon her? we heard them rushing through the tree-tops, but later they were silent."

A third man who had been listening spoke. "I doubt whether a weapon could be used against her: yet Pinjaroo has promised."

"Ah, Pinjaroo, he is well versed in the mysteries and powers of the Gods! Perhaps the Naki will strike her down—— But see the light yonder. He is returning, and has with him the she-devil. It is not well to cross her path. Come quickly lest they see us."

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## CHAPTER X

### THE SPELL

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**A** LINE of natives, each employed at his task, worked in the chequered sunlight, which fell through the high arching palm-leaves. At intervals, as if moved by some swift impulse, they would break into repetitionary chants which in a few moments would fade abruptly to silence. Near one end of the line, Blunt sat beside a heap of broken nuts, and with slow, though skilful, sweeps of his knife would cut out the flesh, piling it in a smaller heap at his side. Sometimes he would pause and look down the line of native workers, and sometimes, through the stems of the trees, out toward the sea.

For a long while his gaze remained fixed over the wide placidity of the lagoon. He was motionless, absorbed in thought. Now and then one of the natives would look inquiringly at him, but Blunt was oblivious.

The events of the last three days, if such subtle interchange of sensibilities could be called events,

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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passed recurring through his mind. It was the very quality of their lightness which was exasperating. Nothing had occurred ; everything was impending. Yet, as he gazed out over that shining water, he felt that already the smallest details of his fate were determined. The balance had swung to one side, to the other ; now it was steady, fixed irrevocably. Would that calm ever break ? The long line of the horizon stretched taut and mute ; he was filled with impatience—impatience for that which could neither be hurried nor retarded.

His thoughts went back over all the incidents : first his delight at finding her safe, followed by sharp disappointment at perception of her unaccountable estrangement. She had been as if dead to the contact of his hope, buried beneath fields of snow —far from the love that was now burning in his heart. She had been cold ; the life and girlhood, which had seemed on the point of blossoming, had been far-withdrawn, nipped by fatal frost. For that night and the next day she had been frozen, infinitely distant. He must begin over again to quicken her spirit, to lure her towards life. And she must, she *must* live. She must come to meet him since he could not go to meet her. He had tried to meet her. They had talked. Dogma, like rocks of ice, enclosed that which he longed to meet full in the warm sunshine of life. She had spoken of sin, of the powers of evil, of the howling devils that raced through the tree-tops, of the tempter and of

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self-immolation. He had believed that for some inscrutable reason Matana was affecting her with a sickness of the soul. Even so far as she had become free for life, even so far, now she appeared drowned in a timeless sea of negation. Her spirit seemed to him like some unearthly flower whose purity was preserved by the cold breath of denial. Yet he could divine that there was a warmth enclosed in some secret channel, seeking communion, with a mystical Godhead. Because of that warmth he could never give her up. Those walls of dogma—they must fall. She must come to meet him ; he would take her out into the sunshine, and dare even the gloom of the tropics. They would live, not in any promised beyond-world or paradise of the spirit, but upon the eternal, ever-changing surface of the earth.

And he believed that she would come to him. Life would not be denied. The spirits of air, sea and sunlight were his allies. He had but to wait. He would be victorious, and at his own terms. He shook his head dispelling a crowd of fancies—what she had offered, his pride would never accept—to think that in that mood of negation of frozen selflessness she would have offered to become his wife ! He was glad that he had not hesitated. Yet the memory of that scene caused him pain. The situation also was verging on the absurd. Whither were these complexities of civilisation leading ? What unsuspected elements in his nature were coming to light ? His pity had seen and compre-

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hended the conflict of soul against body. Not as a sacrifice, but with human passion as woman to man must she surrender.

And now a soft breeze was blowing across the lagoon. The steely line of the horizon had vanished, dissolved in haze. Far away were vague forms of distant islands. He looked down at the tanned skin of his hand, which rested idly upon his knee ; and his memory went back to the time when, as a boy, he had sat looking at the supple flesh, the joints of fingers and wrist, and wondering at that strange entity which was himself. Imagination was not now so vivid as in youth. He was no longer sickened by fear at realisation of his spirit's loneliness. He had grown accustomed to the limitations of the five senses.

All down the line of workers he could see the natives either breaking the nuts and throwing them aside, or scooping the broken halves with short, curved knives. Sometimes a gang of workers would come from among the tree-stems with laden baskets and replenish the heaps.

Blunt turned again to his work, but during the hours that followed, his thoughts continued to move backward and forward over the same ground. He remembered too how Matherson had told him not to be in a hurry. It was not his nature to be in a hurry, but he must not let the right moment pass.

A few minutes before sunset, work was suspended, and the fresh copra was put under cover for the

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## THE SPELL

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night. The lagoon, within the protecting arc of the bay, remained placid as usual, and tones of grey and mauve succeeded the brighter blues and greens of earlier hours. Upon the horizon to the northward, the distant islands stood in dark silhouettes, like pieces of tinfoil set against the pale rose of the sky.

### II

There was to be a native festa and no work would be done. It was the yearly celebration held in honour of the cigales, which were now just commencing to crawl up out of the ground. In the early mornings the fat grubs could be seen clinging to stems and tree-trunks, but as soon as the sun's rays touched them, the thin integuments would split down the back, and the pale, yellow-green insect emerge. Within a couple of hours their wings would be hardened, then, with a buzz, they would fly high amongst the green leafage and begin their long, vibrating song of praise to the sun. Blunt remembered well the festa of the previous year. He had been present as the most honoured guest. It had been at such times that he had felt most akin to the people of his adoption. He understood their wonder at the seasonal recurrence of nature's power, and the vague symbolism by which they made it manifest.

For them, the cigale was a symbol of the sun's might, rising up out of the earth to sing his praises.

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The cigale also was the enemy of the rain, which at this season was dreaded on account of the fierceness of its downpour. No native would willingly kill a cigale, for by this injury, the power of the sun-king might be weakened, and the spirit of rain might prevail.

This year Blunt knew that his presence at the festa would not be tolerated. He could not disguise to himself the pain of this estrangement. It had been madness, and a missionary madness, to bring a white woman to Matana. And yet. . . . Could he ever reconcile that contradiction? Must he leave Matana and the accomplished work of eight years? Perhaps. . . . And in exchange; a unique, personal love! Between himself and the possibility of harmony in such love was the gulf of their difference in faith.

Blunt had made up his mind that he would not remain at Matana while the spring festival of the cigales was being celebrated. He would make a day-long expedition among the islands to northward, and would take Eva with him. It would be amusing to show her the swirling current and to watch the effect of the magic beauty of that place. Eva had welcomed the prospect of a long day on the sea.

They started in the cool of early twilight, and pushed their way through the dew-wet grass to the river's edge. The canoe floated easily down the stream, and now skirted the black ranks of

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## THE SPELL

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mangrove thicket and the long banks of shining mud, over which hosts of red and yellow crabs scuttled. Blunt inclined the canoe towards the bank, that Eva might get a closer view of the grotesque little fellows.

"Do you see their big claws—one ever so much bigger than the other? To keep their balance, they have to carry the big claw high over their backs. Unless they held them so, they would not be able to walk and would topple over."

"But can they not use them?" she asked.

"I don't know. I don't think so. They have a little claw on the other side which they use; but the big one is obviously out of all proportion."

"Then why do you think they have it?"

"Indeed I don't know," he said, smiling. "They look rather like respectable gentlemen carrying about a sense of their own virtue, and just a little bit afraid that they may lose their balance. It looks as if God has some kind of a sense of humour— And by the way, have you seen climbing fish before? There are two perched up there among the branches. How they crawled up the stems is a mystery, but they are always here amongst the mangroves, and seem able to live out of water for hours."

Eva looked at the climbing fish which, with large ugly heads and goggle eyes regarded her from a distance of some three feet above the water line. "What extraordinary things," she said. "Are they really fish?"

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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"Don't you think they are rather like men trying to live in an atmosphere to which they are not adapted?" said Blunt. "They look thoroughly self-conscious of the strangeness of their conduct. . . . Well, shall we leave these creatures of the mud, and get out to sea?"

She nodded in response, wondering at the mental attitude which saw human life in forms of grotesque fishes and mis-shapen crabs. There was something that was amusing in the analogy, and here in direct contact with unfettered nature it seemed rather a pleasing attitude.

The water ran with soft gurglings along the sides of the canoe as they moved away from the land towards a belt of darker green which ran parallel with the reef.

"I shall have to work steadily for an hour or two," Blunt said. "We have a long way to go."

"Are those the islands that I see in the distance?"

"Yes."

"Will you be able to get all that way?"

"They are not so far as they look."

"Can I not help you?"

"If you like. You can take a paddle for a bit, but don't tire yourself. You must keep in time with me. . . . You had better not take such long strokes."

For some time they worked without speaking, content to feel, on their faces, the fresh coolness of the morning, and, beneath them, the boat gliding

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## THE SPELL

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quickly forward over the placid water. The long dripping ripple of the paddles was the accompaniment of their thoughts, and each stroke was taking them further from the complexities and problems of Matana. But as the sun lifted its rim over the edge of the hills, Blunt held his paddle, letting the canoe glide silently on its own gathered momentum. He did not need to look at his companion—to know that she was stirred by the beauty of the silence.

The hills cast a dark shadow upon the scene, but, beyond its edge, the sunlight struck the breaking surf upon the reef, kindling it to silver and gold. Beyond the reef was the milky azure of the sea, while in the foreground palest emerald alternated with streaks of olive green. The land to eastward was black against the white splendour of sunrise. Not a sound came from the shore, and from the sea only the distant breaking of waves upon the reef.

"I shall strike in toward the land," he said at length, "to keep under the shadow of the hills as long as possible."

Eva nodded in acquiescence. Once more the paddles dipped in unison and the canoe swung gently forward.

It was not for long that the shadow of the hills offered protection, and soon they were working under the glare of the climbing sun.

"You must stop paddling now," said Blunt, "or you will soon get tired out. . . . It's all right

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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about me; I'm accustomed to this sort of thing; I am tough and well seasoned."

Eva drew in her paddle, and sat idle, letting her eyes wander over the smooth surface of the water and away to the rocky coast, over the black masses of vegetation, up the broken terraces of rock, to the hills beyond.

### III

By an hour before noon they were in amongst the islands. The scene was different from that of Blunt's early morning visit. Then it had been bathed in the freshness of dawn; his senses had been beguiled by gently, imperceptibly changing phases that had led him out beyond himself into the nascent mystery of the tropics. Now, all was clear and hard. The sun was almost overhead, and its rays fell fiercely upon the deep blue of the sea. The coral sand, of which most of the smaller islands were composed, blazed white against the water. Hardly a breeze stirred. Blunt took the canoe as close as he dared beside the whirling current. He told Eva of his earlier adventure and of the disappearing branches. He did not allude to his subsequent fever dream, nor the fable concerning the Naki. He pointed out the island of Lula.

"I have always meant to land on that island," he said, "but have never done so. The natives have a tradition of some charm, a magical potency with which it is endowed. They avoid it as a rule,

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and only make visits on special occasions. Probably the legend has its origin in some record of an earlier volcanic activity. You can see that the island is formed by the crest of a now extinct volcano that has its roots far under the sea."

"I can well understand how such a place should become clothed in legend. I have never in dreams imagined anything like this. It's terribly hot here," she added. "It's so still; no breath of air."

Blunt recommenced paddling with long, firm strokes, heading the canoe for the island. "Do you see that dark clump of fig-trees a little way back from the shore? We can have our meal there, and rest during the heat before we return."

They landed by the mouth of a small stream, which poured its clear water over glassy obsidian into the sea. They pulled the canoe high on to the beach, then followed the stream, under closely-matted leaves, through which they had to push their way. Suddenly there opened before them wide and airy caves of dark-green foliage, formed by the branches and leaves of fig-trees. Under foot was a carpet of close-grown moss.

"We shall not find a better resting-place," said Blunt as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "The water from the stream is clear and fresh, and cooler far than what we have in our bottles."

Eva had paused, looking up into the leafy spaces between the boughs. "If I had had experience of

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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this sort of place earlier, before coming to Matana," she said, "I should have understood the natives better. I see now how easy it must be for them to believe that such a place is sacred to some deity. I understand too what you mean by saying that they have a religion of their own which has an appropriate significance."

He was amused and pleased at her animation. "I'm glad you see what I mean," he nodded. "Well, shall we have our meal here?"

They sat on the soft turf, and while they lunched he told her of other places, of strange beauty, which he had found hidden away unsuspected like jewels in the jungle; and how that, for the most part, the far-stretching tangles of vegetation, which clothe the rocky interior of islands and mainland, were, if not ugly, at any rate subtly repulsive and somehow threatening in their aspect, but that, here and there, places of fantastic beauty lay hidden among the heaving folds of undergrowth.

After their meal, Blunt, who had been working long hours of the forenoon under the scorching rays of the sun, felt extraordinarily sleepy. He excused himself to his companion and leant back to rest against the broad stem of a fig-tree.

How long he slept he did not know, but he was suddenly conscious of the sound of running water. A dream coloured by some strange fantasy illuded his waking sense. The green leaves arched above him, not a ray of sunlight penetrated, no smallest

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speck of sky was visible. All other sounds save that of the running water seemed shut out by the thick canopy of leaves. Opposite, only a few yards distant, Eva was standing. She was gazing intently in amongst the leaves. Something peculiar about her caught his attention. What it was he could not tell, but he was at once thrilled by a passive, mild excitement. Yet he remained as under a spell, motionless, watching her from half-closed eyelids.

She moved slowly away, bending her head beneath the branches. At a little distance, where undergrowth and creepers barred her passage, she stood as if listening. The circle of undergrowth enclosed her, walled her round, and beyond it was the unexplored jungle. She turned, walked back to the stream and knelt beside it. Her face was half-inclined toward him, her lips moved, as she made a small, vague gesture with her hand. Her glance wandered high up amongst the branches.

It was the gesture of her hand which told him that she had come to life ; that she lived as he had longed for her to live. The sensuous life of the jungle was now strong in her veins, acid, fresh drawn from the earth like the salt sap of a tree.

The muffled excitement in his breast seemed at that moment to break bonds ; it gripped sharply at his heart. He sat up opening his eyes, and their glances met. For a few moments they looked at each other without speaking ; then he rose and

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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walked to where she crouched by the stream. Again for a little he paused. She was now looking down at the water, but he could see how fast her heart was beating and how, like himself, she was trembling. He stooped and lifted her. He saw her eyes wild and full of reproach, then, with an inarticulate sound, her arms were about his neck. She was clinging to him, meeting his kisses with passionate, trembling ardour.

### IV

It was late afternoon, and Blunt and Eva had followed the stream up the ravine. They now stood on the lower lip of a crater. The mountain rose high and steep beyond. Blunt had been puzzled as to the origin of the stream which had served as a guide and thoroughfare through the thick jungle, but now he could see it far above, falling in thin cataracts down the mountain slope, and, at last, plunging into the narrow neck of the dead volcano. How far it had penetrated down into the heart of the mountain he could not guess, but it had filled the neck with water so that a circular pool of about thirty feet in diameter with perpendicularly descending sides was now formed. On three sides walls of green obsidian rose sheer from the surface, so that the pool appeared to lie at the bottom of a shaft. On one side only was there an outlet where the water overflowed, cutting a deep channel through the easily corroded rock.

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## THE SPELL

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On the far side of the shaft, and high above them, the descending stream formed a small waterfall breaking over smooth rock-surfaces and over tufts of fern and liverwort. The falling water sang a continuous, small song to itself ; the shrill notes of its break and fall mingling and alternating with the deeper notes of its union with the black water. Within the shaft the air seemed very cold in comparison with the steaming heat of the surrounding undergrowth. Blunt and his companion paused for a while on the lip of the crater, looking with astonishment and pleasure at this unexpected scene. They walked forward nearer to the water and rested on some rocks, which projected from the cuplike floor of the crater. After talking for a while about the curious formation of the place, of the strange combination of natural forces which had produced it, and of its cool seclusion, Blunt looked up at the pendulous festoons of creepers which hung far down the sides of the shaft, and which swayed above his head, stirred by runnels of water, moving rhythmically from one side to another.

" Such a place as this I have long been looking for," he said. " I can almost believe that I have been always seeking it. And I *have* believed that there was some place, cool and remote. It was a vague, imaginary place, only half imagined, but unconsciously, I believe, I was seeking it."

" Such a place as this ? "

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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"Yes. . . . But it is you who have led me here. Without you I should not have come."

He stood up, and for a time watched the ripples which passed in successive rings across the surface of the dark pool, struck the sides, hesitated for a moment, and then, diminished in strength, fought their way back against the ever-recurring sequence of their successors. "Even now I am surprised. Is it not strange that we should have come here together? It was at your suggestion that we left the cool shade of the fig-trees."

"But it is cooler here," she said.

"Yes, and more free. . . . Do you believe that the shaft of the dead, old volcano reaches deep down to the very roots of the mountain, far under the sea? How deep do you suppose this water is?"

"Suppose that it has no bottom?"

"Does it fuse and mix with the earth's central heat?"

"Something of that sort."

After a pause he said. "Do you see how sheer the sides go down, quite perpendicular; and do you think that within that narrow circumference deep down there are fishes?"

"Oh yes, there must be fishes," she said smiling, "but I don't think they ever come to the surface."

He looked at her intently, then smiled and said whimsically, "I suppose, Eva, that you knew from the very beginning, before you left England, that

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## THE SPELL

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you were coming here to help me discover this island and this pool?"

She shook her head. "What a questioner you are! To-day I can't remember. . . . I certainly don't believe that I ever planned anything. . . . It's bewildering enough to think what I am becoming."

"It would not be difficult to add a supernatural attribute to this island, and believe that it banished memories of the past. . . . Listen how silent it is here. . . . No, when one listens it is not silent. Apart from that falling water, do you not hear a dull roar? That is made by the wings of innumerable insects in the jungle that surrounds us. . . . And if you listen attentively—can you hear an intermittent noise far away? That is the rise and fall of the breakers on the reef."

"Yes, I can hear," she said.

As he met her eyes he could see a shadow of fear flicker for a moment and pass. "What an immense amount of life there is!" She spoke slowly and in a low voice. "It is in everything, everywhere" . . . and then, "Oh, James, my dear, give me time; give me time to breathe; I am so unaccustomed to—"

"Yes."

"So unaccustomed to life!"

Blunt put his hand upon her arm. He shook his head drolly and smiled at her. She rose and stood beside him watching him intently. Their

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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hands met and clasped, then he led her towards the edge of the water.

Although the depths that they looked down into were still and dark, Blunt was fascinated by the surface ripples which unceasingly chased one another, and although they were most diminutive, mere undulations, he had a mental image of the waves of the seashore ; and the sound of the insects' wings in the undergrowth mingled with roar of breakers. He turned and took Eva in his arms and kissed her.

She did not now meet his kisses with the struggling ardour of an awakening passion. She made neither response nor resistance. Her lips were cold, and she trembled slightly at his touch. "This place is enchanted," she whispered.

"Are you happy?"

"Yes, I am happy. . . . No, happiness is not the word."

"But at last you love me?"

"Yes, I love you."

V

They stood close to the water's edge and watched the spray from the waterfall fly up, fall and race over the surface in little, black bubbles, which suddenly disappeared. At their feet there was a tuft of fern, and out of it there glided a small snake. He was red and black with a zig-zag and diamond pattern down his back, and close round his neck was a yellow ring. His head and eyes were black.

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## THE SPELL

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He swam slowly across the pool, skirted the disturbance made by the falling water, then disappeared among a thick growth of fern.

Eva's fingers tightened on those of her companion.  
“ Is that a poisonous snake ? ” she asked.

“ Yes, I think so from the shape of his head.”

“ Is he dangerous ? ”

“ Not if we leave him alone. He is rather beautiful, don't you think ? ”

“ Yes, in a sort of way. Yes, he is.”

“ Some of the natives in this part worship snakes,” said Blunt meditatively. “ They believe that certain snakes were their ancestors.”

“ How strange of them. Do they really believe that ? ”

He nodded, amused at her interest and her seriousness.

“ Perhaps that little red and black snake is the one they come here to worship,” she said.

“ It's possible. It rather fits in with the pool, don't you think ? a sort of finishing touch. It just needed a red and black snake to complete it.”

“ It was a water snake, was it ? Of course it was ; and there is no other fresh water near here ? ” Blunt caught a sudden note of excitement in her voice.

“ No, there is no water anywhere near ; you can see there is nothing but the ravine and the hills.”

“ Then it must have been the God of the place. I'm glad we've seen it.”

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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Blunt laughed at her childish animation. Was it possible that this was the same woman who, day after day at Matana, had frozen him into subjection. He felt confirmed in his philosophy that life could only exist in the swing, the recovery, and the balance between contradictory forces.

"What are you thinking of that you are so silent?" she asked.

"I was thinking that people who enjoy life most, think least about it. . . . But listen, did you hear anything?"

"No."

"Now, there again."

"What is it?"

"Now, do you hear it distinctly?"

"Yes."

"It's a gust of wind coming from the north."

The sound was at first like a distant and gigantic sigh, which grew louder as they listened. "It may strike these islands or may spend itself on the mainland. They come sometimes like this as forerunners of a hurricane. . . . Now, now do you hear?"

The trees high up on the mountain suddenly bent and roared—the air was filled with the deep-pulsing presence of the wind. Down the narrow neck of the volcano it twisted and shrieked. The water on the pool rose into small waves, lapped over the edge of the rock. The wind dashed like some wild animate force down the ravine. Instinc-

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tively the man and the woman crouched close to the rock, while the trees on either side bent their heaving boughs, and festoons of hanging creepers strained and fluttered.

Then, in a minute, it was gone, and once more there was stillness.

"It is a forerunner," said Blunt, "come to warn us. There will be a big storm by night. . . . We must get back to Matana as quick as we can; at all events reach the mainland. You have never seen a tropical hurricane, well, it's no joke being caught out in one." He looked up at the sky, which was still calm and unclouded. "There may be plenty of time, but we ought to go at once."

Eva caught at his hand; she was smiling and her eyes were bright. "It's rather frightening," she said, "but it's wonderful. . . . It's part of the beauty of this place, of the wonder of the tropics."

"It will make us damned wet and cold," said Blunt, laughing. "Come, we must go at once."

### VI

They found the canoe where they had left it, but the lagoon, instead of being dead calm, was now agitated by long swaying undulations, and out on the reef's edge glassy rollers gathered and fell.

"I shall head straight across for the land," said Blunt; "shall then keep close in shore and paddle

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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as far as I can, before the storm strikes us. We may have to walk the last part of the journey. . . . One never knows at this time of year. . . . It may come to very little and on the other hand we may have a bad blow."

"I hope there will be a storm," said Eva.

"That's because you haven't been in one."

They ran the canoe down the beach, and were soon afloat. A current carried them straight away from the island. For a while Blunt made use of it, but before long he found that they were being drawn sideways out of their course and that they were surrounded by the short, rushing waves of a race. There was something uncanny about the swiftness of the current, as if it had a malicious intent. It gave him a short throb of fear. He had to work with all his strength to get clear away. He told Eva of the natives' fear of these whirling currents, and of the fables about the Naki. She listened with bright, excited eyes.

For an hour they kept close under the land, making good progress on the homeward journey; then came the second puff of wind. It was similar to the first, but its time of duration was longer. It raced high overhead, swaying the upland forest; the lagoon yet remained calm and unrippled. And now, when they looked northward, they could see two separate columns of cloud, which seemed to rise separately out of the sea. Rapidly, these columns swelled and increased, bursting to nimbus

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## THE SPELL

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growths, which, in the rays of the setting sun, glowed crimson. Upon that side where the light struck, the rapidly changing surfaces were ablaze with colour, while on the east, and in the deep clefts between those cloudy masses, cold grey mingled with violet. Blunt bent with renewed energy to his work. The canoe shot swiftly and silently southward.

Thick layers of cloud covered the sky. The sun was no longer visible, and dull twilight rested upon loud complaining forests and tempestuous sea. Squalls of rain, like long grey feathers, swept in recurring ridges north and south. Blunt had not been caught unawares. He had abandoned the canoe, and had struck inland towards a well-worn native path which led over the hills to Matana. Under the partial shelter of an upstanding rock, he and his companion now paused and looked out over the wind-lashed sea.

"Do you see yonder," he said, "those round things, like wheels, whirling along close to the shores?—Those are the heads of cocoa-nut palms, broken clean off. I wonder how many of mine will have gone. Now hold tight——" The words were cut from his lips as the wind veered. He flung an arm round Eva, with the other clutched at a shoulder of rock. They crouched till the gust had passed.

In the first moments of the rainfall they both had

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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become wet to the skin. Eva's hair was blown loose and was hanging in wet streamers about her face. She was flushed with the excitement that comes with the consciousness and relish of danger. She felt a wild indifference to her fate. What did anything matter now? For this inspired, everlasting moment she was alive; the long-pent forces of nature were beating the waves to fury. The hurricane held her in its arms. She was alone in the half-darkness, under the slash of the rain with the man she loved. She felt that she was possessed of all knowledge. She knew all about this serious child of a man who was her companion. All the events of his childhood were plain and revealed to her. She knew with precise knowledge what he had been like as a baby. She could read it all in the hard-set lines of his face. What was he going to tell her to do? If he told her to plunge into the sea she would do it without question. She could see that he was shouting something, but in the roar of the wind could only just catch his words.

"Are you cold?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"We must climb this short rise just in front. You must hold fast to me. Link your arm into mine—up there the wind will be terrific. But once we are on the other side it won't be so bad. Further inland among the thick undergrowth it will be easier, and from where we strike the path it's only a matter of four miles."

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## THE SPELL

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Again Eva nodded acquiescence. There was no need for her to speak ; she was willing to obey any of his commands. She was neither tired nor cold, was almost unconscious of her body, and was upborne by a strange excitement. Both the past and future had drifted to unconsciousness, so intense was the flame of the present.

Once they left the shelter of the rock, their difficulty was to avoid being blown over and whirled away by the wind. Several times they had to lie flat on the ground, then crawl a little distance and lie flat again. On the crest they had to cling face downward for some minutes, till a lull allowed them to scramble to the far side. As they descended the force of the wind was less fierce ; progress was easier and it was not long before they struck the native path of which Blunt had spoken.

Although it was now grown much darker, it was still possible to see the way. There was a moon somewhere behind the clouds, which, although not visible, shed a dull glow separating the comparative darkness of the jungle from that pitch blackness in which it was impossible to move. Frequently lightning would stream athwart the sky in livid ribbons or, in streams starting from a thousand sources, would converge to flashing rivers falling from sky to sea. At such times twigs and leaves would stand in black, clear-cut silhouettes against the palpitating whiteness of air.

The illusion of life and the illusions of a dream

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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sometimes mingle and interchange. It was in a dream poignantly vital, more real than all former reality, in which Eva walked. The continuous howl of wind and rain passed overhead, and the trees sang and roared in answer. Her senses answered magnetic to the storm forces without, yet her heart was like a warm cave of peace, where dreams and the restful magic of slumber met. The path through the jungle was black and uncertain, and often pierced through masses of all-obscuring leafage. Sometimes it crossed by a bridge made of a single tree-stem over a deep ravine. She would then put her hands on Blunt's shoulders and follow in his footsteps. At other times they walked side by side, their arms about each other, and her flesh sang with joy at the contact. He was for her, on that wild night of storm, a symbol of strength. He was the Adam of her need, the simple integrity of earth, the significance given by humanity to life.

Once they rested in a deserted native house ; they sat close together listening to the storm noises. They spoke very little, the contact of hands and lips could say more than words.

The storm, like many of such fierce onslaughts of the tropics, was of short duration, and, by the time that they had reached the well-known path that led up to Matana, the wind had already abated. The lightning had passed southward, and, though rain still fell in intermittent showers, the clouds were rising and separating. Here and there dim

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moonlight shone from between the blacker masses. All was quiet in the village, and as Blunt passed he thought what an ending of ill omen the storm would have made for the cigale festa. He wondered vaguely whether in their timid superstition the natives would connect the downpour at so inauspicious time with Eva's presence or with his visit to the northern islands. He had, however, little inclination for such thoughts. He could shrug his shoulders at the irrelevancy of the whole stupid business. Now at last he was alive in the present. Speculations no longer consumed him. As they approached the house he saw that one of the passage windows was swinging open. He was a little surprised, as he believed that he had shut them all ; but this too he dismissed.]

"Are you tired ?" he asked.

"Oh, no, I'm not tired. The storm has made the air so fresh. I feel I could go as far again."

On the verandah Eva stopped and looked back. "See," she said, "the moon is just coming out, there is a break in the clouds."

They watched the edge of the shadow move toward them and pass. The dripping foliage now glittered, and the distant sea appeared white as milk. Eva stood as if spell-bound gazing into the night.

Blunt watched her face, marvelling at the change which had come upon her.

"Are you not cold ?" he asked at length.

"No, not cold." Then after a pause : "Only happy."

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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He put his arms round her and kissed her. "We have come to the end of our journey," he said.

"No, to the beginning."

"Both to the end and to the beginning," he said after a pause. "For this is our marriage night."

She looked at him steadily. Then together they went into the house.

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## CHAPTER XI

### COUNTER-MAGIC

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#### I

HEAT, moist and shimmering, surged like a viscous fluid within the valley ; it overflowed the hill-ridges, and in long tongues as of transparent lava flowed down the further sides. It reached the jungle-grasses, became diffused among the multitude of stems. It piled itself up, strata upon strata. The palm-trees dipped their long leaves in its surface ; then, imperceptibly, slowly, it slid on toward the sea. The sun blazed, hard and white, upon that vitreous, palpitating humour. Its heat was magnified, concentrated as by a lens. Each ray was like a spear struck deep into the earth, a spear whose shaft vibrated under the weight of the blow.

Within the house the heat was only a few degrees less intense than in the sunlight. The green blinds were all drawn, and no breath of air came to stir them. Waves of heat eddied about the walls, and

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closed over the white planes of the roof. Within the darkened rooms there was stillness.

Eva was alone ; Blunt had promised that he would return within an hour. It was necessary, he had told her, that he should go early to the plantation. Work would have to be resumed. Besides, if he were away, the natives might attribute a score of false reasons to his absence. They might think that he was afraid, and know that he was conscious of their slowly ripening hostility. He had gone, too, partly because of old-established habit, and because some inner consciousness warned him that best safety lay in holding fast to the outward order of his past life.

He had been stirred vaguely, inarticulately, to the promptings of a new hope, for which he had not a name, and which was too newly born to bear the weight of words. His instinct towards life was suffering a change. He had been reticent, speaking only of trifles, leaving his actions to convey the tenderness of his heart. With the passing hurricane all the restlessness of the past weeks had been swept away. A calm night had followed, and with the night's tranquillity had mingled his own sense of physical relief. His mind as yet but dimly stirred. He wanted life more than ever before, but, at the same time, was careless of his wants. He had perceived Eva's restlessness and her need for his presence, and when the ascending sun, together with the absence of wind, had produced that stagnant,

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## COUNTER-MAGIC

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oppressive heat which at times settled upon Matana, he had suggested that they should go again to the lagoon. There they would feel any breath of wind that was blowing, and so escape the almost intolerable suffocation. In an hour he would return, and together they would make their way through the sheltering leaves of bananas and paw-paws down to the river.

And now Eva was alone. It was strange to be alone again. How still, how suffocatingly hot the house was. She was not yet dressed, and hesitated with her hand upon the door of her room. She stood listening. It was almost as if she was afraid to meet her former self there. That room had become so full of her own presence ; as if she had been a stranger, she paused with her hand upon the door. In an hour, he had said, he would come back. What an eternity of time here in the suffocating heat ! Matana had never seemed so hot and breathless. In her room it might be cooler ; her window overlooked a view of the bay. She opened the door and entered.

Some quality of her life in England seemed to cling to the white curtains ; it found life among the things upon the dressing-table and in the crucifix over her bed.

She closed the door and stood for a moment as if fearing some unspoken reproach. Then suddenly the blood rushed in a wave of colour over her face and neck ; her heart leapt and pounded in fear.

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There was something lying upon her bed. Her hands were raised to her throat pulling at her collar ; she stood gasping for breath. What horrible thing was that ? What foul pollution ? With a desperate courage she walked across the room. Upon her pillow was a large bone. One end was foul with stains of blood and fragments of adhering flesh ; the other end was whitened by the strokes of an implement, it was hollowed out. She gazed at it in horror. What could it mean, and from whence had it come ? Was it perhaps a symbol of her own pollution ? She had sinned. Was she waking now from a dream ? A fierce remorse seemed to tear at the very fibres of her brain and heart. There before her rose a picture of her past self, pure and unsullied. No, not pure, for the seeds of passion had been there, though unsuspected. Would God be able to forgive her ? Would Christ have compassion ? She had sinned against God, against her own body, which was not hers but God's ; the temple of the Holy Spirit. And she had thought that that was love ! But now she saw that it was voluptuousness ; it was a blind passion, born of the storm and of the jungle. Would not love have controlled passion ? With one grain of divine love she would have been safe. Oh ! she was without virtue, weak, abominable, filled with impurity. She had forgotten not only her own soul but the sanctifying omniscience of God. How could she make amends ? There upon her pillow, which she should have kept

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## COUNTER-MAGIC

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undefiled, lay the symbol of impurity, a reeking bone.

Oh God, forgive ! She had stretched out her hand, but could not make her fingers touch that dreadful thing. She gazed at it with mingled horror and self-accusation, and as she looked, she *felt* that it was charged with evil. All her senses were alive to the congested explosive evil of its aspect. She believed in a devil, and surely this was devil's work. From it there seemed to emanate both crude and subtle influences. It was both obscene and secretive. It was filled with a hidden, personal danger to herself. It had been put there in hatred, with malignant intent. . . . And now her armour was broken. . . . She had forgotten God ; was no longer worthy of His protection.

Her hand felt for the cross, but it was not at her neck. Looking up, she saw it hanging beside the crucifix ; that too she had forgotten.

Her lips moved as she prayed in silence. She knelt before the crucifix. "Christ have pity on me. Help me to expiate my sin. Thou Who art the spirit of perfect love, of wisdom, of compassion, help me to expiate my sin." In the ecstasy of her entreaty her hands clenched fast upon one another. Her face became white and drawn, and tears trickled slowly down her cheeks.

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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### II

When Blunt returned he found the house silent ; the blinds were still drawn. He called but received no answer. In that stillness and in that suffocating glare of heat, a premonition of disaster pressed on his heart. Inside the house all was silent. At Eva's room he paused, and stood listening, just as she had done, with his hand upon the door. The premonition of evil weighed heavier. He knocked. There was no answer. He felt as if there were some strange presence in the house, some force that penetrated deep into his body, filling him with lassitude ; yet in all his pulses he was conscious of the beating of his heart. Where indeed had the serene happiness of the morning vanished ? He wrenched at the door, and flung it open, desperate to know the worst.

Eva stood near the foot of her bed. All the colour was gone from her face ; her blue eyes stared at him, as if without recognition. They seemed exceptionally wide open.

"Eva, what is the matter ? What has happened ? She did not answer.

He crossed quickly to her. "What is it ? Tell me . . . You are safe ? No one has tried to hurt you ?" He would have touched her but she drew back.

"Don't touch me. No, no, not again. Don't touch me."

"But what is it ? What has happened ?"

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## COUNTER-MAGIC

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She moved her eyes with a frightened, horrified glance to the bone that lay across her pillow.  
“Look.”

Blunt crimsoned with rage. “God damn them,” he muttered, “damn them, damn them. The swine, the damned swine.” He turned again toward her, but for a while she was mute. His eyes were narrowed, fixed upon her. His hands were clenched, and a small drop of blood ran from his bitten lip on to his chin. “I should never have brought you here,” he said at length. “I ought never to have brought you. We will go away.”

She shook her head and shuddered.

“I am unworthy of the task. I should never have come.” She was again staring with wide-open, unintelligible eyes.

He turned abruptly, pulled up the blind and pushed open the window. A wave of heat surged in and with it the roar of the innumerable winged things of the jungle. He looked at the bone for a moment before seizing it, and he too felt its malignant character, as it lay, a spot of pollution, amidst the white cleanliness of the room. With an involuntary shudder he picked it up and flung it out of the window.

“May their damned magic turn against themselves,” he muttered. He turned to Eva, who was regarding him with a face which seemed strangely to express no emotion. “Eva.”

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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She did not answer.

He divined now how much the atrocious thing had shocked her, and knew well from long experience how that inanimate objects could be possessed with, and could convey, passionate human emotions of hate, rage or despair. It was imperative that she should brace herself against this influence, and he too must hold himself firmly in control.

"Eva, you must try and take them for what it is worth, merely the superstition of savages. It is part of a kind of magic they practise against each other, but we, who know better, must not let ourselves be affected. . . . I cannot tell you how sorry I am it should have happened; and I will make them pay." She stood gazing at him as if she did not hear his words. "It is only the ugly superstition of savages," he repeated. Then, taking a step towards her, "We will go away. As soon as possible we will go away."

"What do you think it meant?" she asked in a low voice.

"Some hokus pokus; they think it will frighten . . . you."

"It meant more than that."

"What then?" He was puzzled by her manner.

"I have sinned against God and against myself. . . . Yes, and against you."

Blunt walked up close to her and looked her straight in the eyes. "Eva, this is nonsense you are talking. You must pull yourself together. What

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## COUNTER-MAGIC

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possible connection is there between——? It is the merest coincidence."

She shook her head. "When I was away with you, they placed it here. It is a sign."

Blunt felt the heat waft in at the open window. In another moment, he believed, it would suffocate him, yet he dared not take his eyes from her face. He must struggle with this illusion, this slavery of remorse; once more he must set her free.

"It is a sign of my pollution," she said. "We have both sinned." Then, in a voice that was almost like a child's crying in pain, "Such a thing would not have happened unless I had sinned. God would not suffer anything to touch me."

"You believe it was sin?"

"Yes, a mortal sin."

"No, you are wrong," Blunt spoke with conviction. "Wrong there with all the error of a thousand years of false religion. It was the beginning of life. We now are married as much as man and woman can ever be married." He placed his hands on her shoulders. She made no resistance now to his touch, but her eyes became lit with a strange ardour.

"You know little of what a Christian marriage can mean. It is a sacrament."

He frowned, perplexed. "I think the justification of a thing done comes from one's own inner feelings, rather than from without."

She looked away from him out of the window. The heat rose shimmering over the palm-trees.

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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The spiral intertwining stems of the black-leaved creepers were still there at the window-casement, only the plant had grown more luxuriant, ranker, and the white, trumpet-shaped flowers were more numerous. Its intent too was more patent. It seemed to coil about itself like a snake, symbolic of the unseen, unhallowed sources of life. She shuddered and closed her eyes. When she opened them she looked at Blunt with entreaty.

"I beg you to leave me."

"No." Blunt was resolute. "We must face this together. Trust me. If you can only trust me and trust yourself! Let us have done with this magic and counter-magic. The source of weakness and of strength is within ourselves. . . . To you, I owe the newer, better half of my life. You have shown me myself, and saved me from what I might have become. I would do the same for you. Can you not also break with the past, and live in the ever changing, ever newly created world, which each instant we discover and recreate for ourselves?" He held her now in his arms, and as he looked into her eyes, he believed for an instant that she would come with him, that they would be free. But only for a moment did she quicken. He felt her stiffen in resistance and shrink away.

She turned her face from him. "I beg you, let me go. Leave me. I need to be alone." Then, with a sudden outburst: "Take your arms away. I cannot bear the touch of them," she cried.

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## COUNTER-MAGIC

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Blunt dropped his arms and stepped back as if cut by a whip. His face had gone pale under his tan, and palely she confronted him. "I am not the sort of woman you think me. I would rather die; would rather kill myself than live with you in sin."

"I am not the man to force you to it," said Blunt coldly.

"Then leave me. I want to be alone."

He turned and walked out of the room.

He had at that moment no plan nor purpose, and in going out on to the verandah he merely went in search of air to cool his anger. On the verandah he stopped for a moment in thought. He went round in front of the window and picked up the bone. Then he went back to the house, took down his riding-whip from the wall and strode away toward the plantation.

Eva stood for some time as if dazed. She heard him pause, return, and depart. Then she flung herself down beside her bed, and, with hands clasped as if in prayer, she wept bitterly.

### III

Blunt's anger was beyond thought of prudence. There was only one man for whom, at any time, he had any feeling of fear, and that was Pinjaroo. It was Pinjaroo whom he now sought.

He found him in the plantation among the men. He

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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flung the bone at his feet. "That was your doing," he said.

Pinjaroo shrugged his shoulders and stared back insolently.

The next moment Blunt had swung the lash across his back.

The native clutched at his knife and ran forward. Blunt's left caught him full in the face, and he went down. Before he could rise, Blunt's boots had been used to good effect, and his ribs resounded to the blows. He lay prostrate and coughing.

Pinjaroo's overthrow had been so swift and complete that the other natives who stood near had raised no hand in his defence. They were quelled by the fierce onslaught of the white man's anger.

Blunt swung the long lash again and again ; nor did he cease to cut at the prostrate body so long as there was any response by groan or whimper.

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## CHAPTER XII

### SECOND IMPACT

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#### I

THROUGHOUT the morning Eva remained alone in her room. Although the heat was oppressive under the low roof of the bungalow, she did not go out to meet the breeze, which swayed the creeper with that faint rattling sound against the window. After Blunt had left her, she moved for a while up and down restlessly. At times she stopped to drink from the canvas water-bottle which hung near the door. Once she went to the window and leant out for a moment, grateful to feel the cooler air on her face, but she quickly withdrew as if assailed with sudden fear. Again she moved restlessly about the room. She knelt down to pray, but did not remain long upon her knees ; with recurring restlessness, she passed from one to another of the familiar objects of her room, touching them with her hands, then moving to the next. At last she paused and remained

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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motionless, as if under the weight of some heavy thought. After a long interval she raised her eyes to the window and shuddered slightly. Again she kneeled down ; this time she did not try to pray but sank almost at once upon the floor. She looked at her bed and again shuddered, then she wept with low restrained sobs. After a while she slept.

At mid-day Blunt returned to the house. He went to her room and knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again more loudly.

“ Yes.”

“ May I come in ? ” His voice was quiet, rather toneless.

There was a pause. Eva raised herself upon one arm. She looked round the room with something of the anguish of an animal caught in a trap. Quickly she got to her feet. Her hands were smoothing the creases of her garments.

“ Yes.”

As Blunt entered he did not look at her directly. She felt that his gaze took in all the circumstances of the room, and she divined anger in that indirect yet comprehensive look. She was suddenly frightened of him, and in amongst her fear came the remembrance that all household duties had been neglected. Between yesterday and to-day there seemed to stretch a gulf which in time and space was infinite. It was strange that memory should be able to bridge that gulf. In an attempt to

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separate a tangle of conflicting emotions, in which her sincerity and even her personal dignity were compromised, she became scorchingly conscious of her inadequacy: inadequacy in every department of life, that even of housekeeper.

"Is it late?" she asked. "Have you been away long?"

He frowned but did not answer at once. At length, looking directly at her, he spoke her name. She met his eyes for a moment, then in a panic forgot everything but the threatened assault upon the living, intricate structure which formed her faith. She clutched now in deliberate, self-inflicted despair at its most rigid elements, those which she believed would stand most firm against exigencies. She heard his words, but in that intensely personal panic which she was experiencing was not sure that she understood the import of what he said.

"I must tell you," he began, "since our lives may possibly be endangered, that I have done what may prove to be an irredeemable folly."

"What do you mean?"

"I do not wish you to think that you are even indirectly responsible. She shrank from the irony of his voice. "But where I should have struck coolly to kill, I struck recklessly, thoughtlessly, for the mere sake of striking. I was impetuous, too angry to think clearly. In that I am directly responsible for our danger."

With a feeling of intense relief she now met

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his eyes. If it were only a matter of personal physical danger, she felt she could meet that.

"We may very well pull through," he continued, "but there must be no ambiguities. We must understand one another." He had come a step nearer to her, and was now intently serious. "This business of the bone and what it stands for . . . you must ignore it. It is a kind of declaration of war, especially against you. They are using their magic, which is the weapon they themselves most fear; that they use it shows, for some strange reason, they are afraid of you. . . . In our eyes it should be harmless enough."

She looked at him, uncertain; "It was so awful," she said.

"I admit it is a distressing, unpleasant sort of thing to happen, but it should not be terrifying. You must keep a bold front, and they will see that their incantations do you no harm. You must find courage to meet this."

She was silent, standing upright in the middle of the room. All colour had gone from her face; her eyes, restless and wan, strayed from object to object.

Blunt was puzzled, and the irritation, kindled by his conflict with Pinjaroo, was fanned by what seemed the unnecessary strain of her behaviour. Yet he was intent to win her for the coming struggle. "You remember the night on the verandah when they threw that spear at you? Well, if you can

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meet this crisis with that sort of courage, there's a good chance for us."

"What have you done?" she asked.

"I have thrashed the man who put the bone on your bed, thrashed him within an inch of his life. That was my mistake; I should have killed him. That particular man is dangerous."

"What must I do?"

If he had asked her coldly and without any sign of emotion to pull herself together, she might have rallied; the danger that they shared in common would make it easy to come to his support. Blunt saw how near he was to winning her again, and all the promise and hope of yesterday blazed up in his heart. He took a step towards her and held out his hand. "Eva, do not renounce and think lightly of our love; together we can face worse things than this."

She stepped back away from him, and that desperate physical panic swept over her again. "Do you not believe that we have sinned?"

"No."

"You do not believe in God," she said.

He faced her without speaking.

She had an impulse to throw herself down and weep, but she remained standing. "I have betrayed myself, betrayed my God. I should never have come." The words broke from her with dry sobs. "It was too awful, too awful a thing to happen. God allowed that hideous bone to be put there

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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because of my sin. Everything here is awful, terrible to me—the trees and the grass and even the creepers that touch the window-sill. Oh, I have lost. . . . I have lost. . . ." Her voice died away abruptly, as if suddenly itself lost in the silence of the tropical noon.

For some moments Blunt did not speak ; his impulse for pity was overcome by the sharpness of humiliation.

" You do not love me," he said at length.

" No, that was not love, that was lust." Her voice was suddenly harsh with self-condemnation.

Blunt turned from her. " Like most civilised people," he said dryly, " you have not the courage of your instincts, and so call them by bad names."

She was swept by a feeling of desolation and fear. Again she had betrayed herself. It was cruel to talk to her now ; she did not know what she was saying, and she had lied. She loved him ; she had given herself to him in love. She loved even his anger. " What do you want of me ? " she asked in a whisper, pressing her hands against her breast.

" I want you to go back to where you came from before it is too late."

" Too late." All the blood in her heart felt as if it had turned black and clotted.

" Before Pinjaroo and his friends cut your throat."

" And you ? "

" I shall stand a better chance alone."

She felt that she could now no longer remain

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## SECOND IMPACT

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isolated in the middle of the room. The feeling of loneliness was too terrible. A new misery had set sharp claws in her brain. She had denied herself falsely. She would have liked then to call out to him to forget the words that she had spoken, but she felt the bitterness of his contempt and was dumb.

She put out her hands and walked swaying towards a chair. She sat down and again lifted her eyes to his ; she longed to speak but her lips could not frame the words that lived in her heart. Life had become sinister and empty. She could no longer face him, but as she looked away, her despair, like some black, personal existence, other, yet part and essence of herself, compelled her lips, against her own volition, to repeat, " I should never have come. I should never have come."

She heard Blunt's voice speaking to her, and like some wounded animal from whom hope has departed, she remained mute. His words sounded harsh and flat. They were reasoned, uninspired words spoken in anger, the more terrible for being controlled. Like stones they fell upon her. He told her how he himself would naturally offer to take her back to Tomanta, and see her safely within the shelter of civilisation, but in the circumstances he dared not leave Matana. It was doubtful even whether he would be permitted to approach his cutter. He told her he would send a messenger to Matherson, who would come over and fetch her

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back to Nathamaki, and from thence she could travel to Tomanta. "That is the best I can do," he concluded. "By to-morrow Matherson should be here. In the meanwhile you can feel yourself freed from all obligations."

She sat motionless without making a sign that she heard or understood. She was buried beneath the weight of his unpitying logic. He ceased speaking. The silence became terrible, but she had not the power to move or break the spell of his indignation. If she were to move, she felt that everything in her would break and fall apart. She must sit very still and quiet.

And now that he had left her and she was alone, she dare not let her mind stray to that burning all-pervading thought of how completely she had failed.

### II

A couple of hours later Blunt was returning from the plantation. He had gone down to look for a messenger to send to Nathamaki, but had found all the drying-screens deserted ; none of the natives were at work. He had realised this was the doing of Pinjaroo, and, with a kind of dull indifference that he was in danger. He had turned towards the village, anxious to put things to the test. If he could meet the natives he believed he could assert his old sway ; but in the village there was not a man to be seen. He had walked from one grass-hut to

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another, and had shouted, but had received no answer. It was a bad sign that they should have hidden themselves. He had then left the village and had returned to the plantation and locked up the copra-houses. All this time he had moved slowly and deliberately. Only a small portion of his thoughts were occupied with his immediate surroundings ; his imagination pictured the small confines of the bedroom. What indeed was a white woman doing alone, in such utter isolation in the heart of Matana ? Her personality, even her womanhood, he thought, was diluted and confused by the complexities of civilised life. She was right when she said that she should never have come . . . ! Well, that was passed, she could not have lived in such conditions ; it was his duty to get her away safely. And now as he paused upon the sun-lit path in thought, he considered how he could possibly get a message to Nathamaki.

For so long had he been accustomed to his surroundings, that although his mind knew well that there was danger, he could not realise it with his senses. He felt only an intense loneliness ; and in spite of his eight years of life in the jungle, he felt more utterly unwanted in a foreign land than in the first critical months when he had come as the new owner of Matana. He was an outcast both from the house that sheltered the white woman, who had brought to it the standards of another land, and from the life of the natives, who one time he had

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known so well. He felt tired of the very process of living, and with a sudden weariness turned into the jungle at the side of the track. He flung himself down under the shade of some young palm bushes.

From where he lay he could look back upon the path which he had just left. He looked out through a tunnel among the leaves, and could see besides the winding uncertainties of the path, which sloped down towards the valley, a distant view of the beach and the sea beyond. As he gazed his old love for Matana rose warm in his heart: the love of the place which, after long search, he had chosen. It was more than the love of a home, for here he had found the harmony with external existence which tamer lands had denied. It was like a woman whom he had conquered by his bravery and his love, one who had whispered to him the most intimate secrets. *That* love was enduring though all else should fail. With what physical and spiritual passion had he touched, during those eight years, the life of forest and of sea.

He thought back upon the time before Eva's coming, before the advent of Matherson. Surely he had known happiness then! Yes, that *was* happiness, though even then he had carried the evil seed in his heart, the heritage of the white man. It was civilisation that he had fled from, civilisation which like a creeping fungus deformed the life and soul of mankind. It was the latter-day curse that had fallen upon the human race. He had fled

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from it over the seas, out into the jungle. He had found it even upon the shores of the uttermost lands. He had moved farther and farther into the wilds until he had found Matana. But after all he was under the curse. The poison was in his blood. The seed had shot up into a plant, had blossomed into a flower. Towards this woman whom he loved, because of his love, he was behaving like any decadent child of culture. If like a primitive, unspoiled male he had taken her by force and compelled her to his use . . . ? She would have wept no doubt then, because of the simplicity of life, she would have laughed, and because of her tears and laughter, she would have loved him. She would have borne him children without question or premeditation.

But no, the canker was in their souls. He had met her with the courtesies of a civilised man. Complexities had filled their hearts ; they had reverenced the trifling idiosyncrasies of individual divergence more than they had reverenced life. He questioned whether ever again he would be able to touch the grass, the trees, the sea and the sunshine, and the supple, amorous bodies of women as once in a glimpse of nature-given freedom he had touched them. The acid and complex pain of love, the love of a civilised man, would not allow him to find an answer.

He looked out over the warm, glittering landscape ; he remembered the silent women of the jungle, who lived by touch rather than by words

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and ideas. The pungent scent of the moist earth was in his nostrils ; he had but to lift his face to feel the harmony of sunshine and moisture. He remembered the native dances, their phallic significance, the leaping flames and the naked scented bodies, the rhythm, the quickening and the relaxing pulse of movement, the dark symbolism of powers moving beneath the surface, the mystery, the contact and the dualism of sex. He thought of the triumphant simplicity of death.

He shivered at the memory of the house and the white woman in her loneliness, entangled in a web-work of spiritual aspirations.

Figures were moving on the path. Two native girls were coming up the hill. A little distance away they turned down a side path towards the village. They were followed by a third girl who did not turn aside. As she came nearer, Blunt recognised her as Uloto.

In an instant he made up his mind. He called to her : " Uloto, come here to me ; it is Tarfia. Do not run away, there is no cause for fear."

The native girl stood silent, alert without movement.

" I am here, this way among the palm bushes. I wish to speak with you. Come before any one sees."

Uloto hesitated for a moment, then bent quickly aside and came towards him. On seeing him she paused. Her bosom rose and fell in deep breaths

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of excitement. She spoke no word. Blunt had not risen but remained seated, leaning back upon his elbow.

"Come nearer, Jungle-bird," he said, smiling. "I want you to carry a message to Nathamaki to the white man who lives there. He is to come here and fetch away the white woman. She is returning to her own country."

Uloto came a step nearer, then stood for some moments in thought before speaking. "The magic is too strong for her," she said.

"Yes, the magic is too strong and she is going." As he spoke he watched Uloto's eyes, wondering what thoughts stirred behind the still mask of her features. "You must carry a message that I give you, but speak nothing to man or woman till you return."

Uloto still hesitated. Narrowing her eyes she asked suspiciously: "How shall I know for sure that she is going? Perhaps, together with the white man, she will make another magic and then remain."

"I tell you that she is going; you know that I speak truth."

The girl frowned. "And when I return?" she asked.

Blunt gave a short, bitter laugh. "When you return and when the white woman is gone, then perhaps I shall burn the house down, and shall take you by the hand and go away with you into

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the forest, and you shall be my woman. When you return and the white woman is gone, there is no saying what I shall do. Perhaps I shall kill Pinjaroo and become chief among the people. But go now swiftly and speak nothing till you return."

Blunt took out his pocket-book, and while he wrote, Uloto watched him with wide, excited eyes. When he had finished writing, he looked up at her. She came close up to him and whispered : " Pinjaroo is very angry ; he is black with hate."

" He is a fat, lame pig. Do you suppose that I fear him ? "

Uloto laughed softly.

" Go now, and when you return tell Illagaroo that the day after the white woman has gone away, every man must be back at work, else they will have cause to fear my wrath. Tell him those are my words."

She did not move, but stood close beside him, watching with half-veiled, meditative admiration, the play of his features ; and at that moment he knew with utter conviction that he had reconquered her, and that he could reconquer them all . . . all save Pinjaroo. He had but to put out his hand and the sensuous mystery of the tropics would again be his. He leapt to his feet and caught the girl in his arms. She yielded soft and limp in a clinging embrace against his body. He kissed her warm, dark lips and for a moment was oblivious ; but, as his muscles relaxed, Eva's face, sad, passionate

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and lit with all the ardour of faith, was before his eyes.

"Go swiftly," he said, "that you come to Nathamaki before morning."

Uloto had stepped back as if suddenly indifferent to his presence, then with a quick glance she asked : "The white woman will not return ? "

"No, she will never return."

Again she seemed indifferent, entirely self-possessed. She nodded to him. "I will carry your message." Then she turned back towards the path, and in a moment had disappeared.

Blunt remained standing for a while in thought, slowly he sat down and reclined again in his old position ; his eyes wandered out over the plantation, the beach and the sea beyond.

### III

He was alone in the Plantation, watching the light fade from the sky. Deliberately he had come to test his fate. If bodily forms moved amongst the tree-tops, he would know that he was to die, if invisible voices only, he would survive this crisis and live.

He soon heard the well-known yet always repulsive voices, and walked slowly in their direction. They fluttered to and fro on the outskirts of the grove, then came towards him, screaming more loudly than he had ever before heard. He peered up,

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searching the tree-tops, but saw neither shadow nor substance. The voices wheeled, circled round him, crying against one another, and dashed suddenly away.

He turned inland with firm footsteps. He had put to the test the fate of his physical life ; now he would test the fate of that other flame which burnt fitful, yet hot within his heart.

### IV

The scene, as Blunt entered, shone in bright contrast to the night shades of the jungle, where outlined masses of vegetation were darkly distinguishable against the more remote cataracts of creepers and undergrowth, which swept downward from the inland hills. Yellow lights and dark shadows fell upon walls and ceiling. Upon a white tablecloth, upon a centre table, supper was spread ; knives and spoons glittered in the lamplight. The blinds were drawn down shutting out all sight of the external world. For some moments Blunt stood in the doorway struck by the contrast between this small, brightly-lit centre of civilisation, so complete and isolated, and his own dark thoughts. He could hear Eva moving in the kitchen. He closed the door noiselessly and stood for a while looking with a kind of perplexed wonder at the set table ; the spoons, the plates, and the forks . . . all the simple paraphernalia of a meal. Simple ? Elaborated rather

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by thousands of years of human progress. How many generations passed before man scooped a bowl in which to place his food? How many generations followed before he spread a cloth on which to serve it? How many generations followed again before he made metal instruments with which to carry it to his mouth? This room, so orthodox in its elaborate simplicity, was similar to the million other homes of civilised men in all civilised lands. As he looked at the familiar objects he was strangely moved. He pitied the courage of that isolated woman, whose destiny, for reasons as yet veiled and inscrutable, had led her through a thousand generations back to the primordial forest. This was her defence, her attack in defence against the unillumined, illimitable mystery: It was courageous and pitiful, and in its pitifulness masteringly strong.

He could hear from the kitchen the click of plates, the undefined noises of the process of cooking, and the singing of a kettle. If he had married Eva, if, even now, he should marry her and not let her go, this was the life he would return to each evening. It was simple, commonplace, without passion, unromantic, yet it was charged with memories, not only of the individual but of the race. No man could escape such memories. Against his will, against all the fugitive yearnings of his life, against his dreams and longings, he felt the potency of that spell. This was the counter-magic with which she defied the primordial man.

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The moment Eva entered, he perceived that the overwrought mood of their last encounter was replaced, if not by ordinary calm, by a control which bore the outward stamp of serenity. "I have been cooking you a good supper," she said as their eyes met, and she smiled. "You deserve that since you missed your meal at midday."

Blunt did not answer at once, but moved forward into the room. In that moment of hesitation, emotions, diverse and inarticulate, claimed all his senses; senses which a minute before had been filled with the half-conscious apprehension of the darkness and silence of night. Because of their diversity they were inarticulate. He could say nothing, he could but meet her eyes with astonishment and wonder. Then as he hesitated, that moment of tension was past, and he turned aside towards his room. "I must wash myself," he said, "but shall not be long."

Never before had he felt with such intensity the uncertainty of his position. Each moment in that so deliberately civilised house altered his mood. The process of washing seemed metamorphic, and as he re-entered the living-room, he felt that, with the ablution of his neck and face, he had put away from his personality that fantastic being, who on the morrow was to take a native girl by the hand and wander away with her into the jungle. Fantastic? Yes, but also real. Was then reality conditioned by fleeting desire? Was this reality?

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From every part of this confined, well-lighted room emanated subtle influences intrinsically mingled with memories of which Eva was both index and consummation.

They sat down together to the meal, and, while they ate, talked of trivial circumstance, hiding from each other those deeper thoughts which once spoken would lead them away from the charmed influence of lamp-light, out into the surrounding darkness. But only for a short while could they find respite in trivialities. The tradition of their race held only to the limit of that small room, and in spite of their lamp-lit isolation, the questions that waited in the darkness floated nearer upon lengthening silences ; unvoiced urgencies flickered between the fall of trivial words. The elemental forces of being, finding in the hushed suspense of night a unification in which matter and spirit combined, weighed upon these children of a later age, oppressing heavily their minds.

"I have sent a messenger to Nathamaki," said Blunt abruptly.

In a moment they were oblivious to the fragile, transitory nature of their surroundings ; the external darkness closed tight upon the room.

Eva did not speak. Blunt continued, looking hard into the lamp without seeing it, "I shall expect Matherson over here some time to-morrow."

In the ensuing silence he became conscious of the two flames burning side by side within the

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lamp, of the bright rims of incandescent carbon which flickered at their edges. Eva's voice when she spoke was soft with a mild deliberation. He felt compelled to look at her though against his will. "When I am gone you will return to your old manner of life?" It was now Blunt who did not speak. "I find it difficult to think of you alone here after I am gone," she said after a pause. "Tell me how you will live?"

Blunt still paused letting his thoughts sink inwards. "I cannot tell. Life here will be different from what it was before," he said simply. "Now you ask me that question I wonder how it is I have lived in the past through all the years of my life. It is a process one were best not conscious of; but since you ask me . . . I shall try to find. . . . I don't know what." He broke off, then added quickly, "What I have always been seeking."

"What is that?"

He got up and went hesitatingly to one of the windows; he stopped as if baffled by the drawn blind; he touched the blind-cord, but in a moment let his hand fall, and turned back into the room. "It's something you would not understand," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because . . . I cannot tell you why."

"Do you despise me so much, then?"

He spoke with a sudden brutality, as if his sincerity could brook not the slightest curb. "I despise the narrow dogma which makes you find sin, which

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looks for sin in nature, and cannot believe in God without believing in sin and damnation."

She remained silent for a while, withdrawn within herself, and as he watched her, he felt that in her withdrawal she was becoming each moment sunk more deeply in a remote and melancholy beauty. It was a beauty different from the simple loveliness of flowers or of the morning sky. It was a beauty that he might be tempted to call unnatural, because unfamiliar. "You are neither one thing nor the other," he said abruptly, in a tone far other from that of his sudden blaze of antagonism.

She let his words go by as if indifferent to any import they might have, then looking up with an intensity of feeling which struck straight at his heart, she said : "That which I told you this morning was not true. I was afraid. . . . When I gave myself to you it was with love, as you know ; but it was not the love that I had imagined. It was not proof against assault ; it was imperfect. But I do love you, and I wish to serve you."

Blunt took a short step away from the window against which he had been standing. His sense impressions became blurred and mingled. He felt that the room had suddenly become large, all-embracing, and that the dim province of the jungle had faded to insignificance. "Why did you come, why ever did you come ?" he demanded. Then as a quick sequence to his thought, as there surged back upon him waves of consciousness of the past

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years : " I cannot leave Matana now, it is too late."

" Then I shall stay with you here."

" Would you marry me ? "

" Yes."

" Do you realise the difference there is between us ? "—the words broke from him passionate and quick—" the difference in thought, in manner of life . . . the immense difference ? "

" I see the gulf which seems to divide us." Her eyes did not move from his face, and her words in their simplicity seemed to fill all the far-stretching unexplored worlds of opportunity which took their being from that remote, almost submerged island of civilisation : " During this day of suffering I have learnt something of humility."

Blunt had not moved from his position near the window. He regarded her white troubled face. He was puzzled, incredulous ; her mind seemed to move deeply below the surface of ordinary thought ; she was mysterious and contradictory. " What do you mean by that ? " he asked.

" I have come to think that no individual act matters so very much ; though of course it will bring its recompense."

He was still puzzled, still uncertain of her. " But this morning . . . all that business about the bone, all that you said. . . . You feel differently now ? "

" I am no longer afraid."

He could read an ardent, though a strained, conviction in her eyes. He was suspicious, mis-

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trusting this newly-found courage, sprung from he knew not what enigmatical source. As he had failed to understand the intensity of moral panic engendered by Pinjaroo's wizard-craft, so also did he distrust her present mood.

"I will stay here with you," she said. Then since he made no response, she added somewhat nervously and smiled, "I could not come all this way to prove myself so utterly a failure."

There was in this something so pathetic ; it was so ill-disguised an appeal that he no longer questioned her motives. Suddenly she had come back to him from out an alien world. She was once more a woman, and, in the swift entreaty of her glance, she had asked him for help and protection.

"Every one fails more or less," he said. Then, taking a step towards her, "You find you can love me ?" he asked.

"Yes, I love you," she said gently. "But . . . we should have waited. . . . We have sinned, and no doubt shall suffer for our sin."

Blunt had come towards her, and now knelt beside her chair. In her eyes, he could see a strange mingling of qualities. There were affection and antagonism, fear and courage. He could believe that there was passion there also, but deep and hidden. He made a gesture towards her, but she resisted him : "No, not yet. Not yet. Do not force me against my faith."

He drew back. Looking at her intently, he knew

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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at that moment that if, by a short act of brutality, he should compel her to his use, that her passion would inevitably rise to meet and be fused with his. He could set a deep mark upon her soul ; her body and being would be his. Together they could escape back into the jungle. The august element of sex would be left bare, stript of all the draperies and trappings of centuries ; and in that nakedness of spirit, he would find, brimming up, as if from an enchanted cup, to be tasted, drunk, quaffed with passion ever young and eternally renewed, an immoderate and primordial joy. Her body in his embrace would remember a forgotten significance. . . . And yet he hesitated ; as he looked into her eyes it was not only pity that touched his heart. Some other quality for which he could find no name arrested his movement, held him astonished. His muscles remained taut and motionless. . . . Though she was near to him, within the clasp of his arms, she was remote.

She put her hands upon one of his, enclosing it with a soft pressure, caressing it gently. The tenderness of her touch was a spell free of sensuous significance, pure, almost cold. "Tell me where you have been all day ?" she asked.

He was amused, staggered by the unconscious triumph of her question. He looked away not wishing to admit the extent of his defeat. "I have been at the plantation but the men are no longer at work."

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## SECOND IMPACT

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"Why is that?"

He knew now that she was safe from him. She would talk to him, question him. He felt like a child kneeling beside his mother. It was strange that things should happen so. He had a fleet impulse to drag his hand away and let out an oath, but, as if hypnotised, he remained passive, finding in inaction a subtle pleasure.

"There is some trouble in the air," he said. "There is a movement among the natives against me. Pinjaroo has probably been stirring them up, and has persuaded them to stay away from work."

"Is that because——?" she left her question unfinished.

"Yes, they think you are some kind of a witch, and that you exercise a magic power over me. Perhaps they are right," he added, smiling.

"Are you in danger?"

"It would seem like something of that sort. I cannot see how things are going to work out."

"But what do you suppose they are doing?" she asked after a pause.

"I can't tell, but they are not far off. *They* are perhaps waiting to see what will happen."

"Why do they hate me so much?"

"They don't understand, and so are afraid."

"I am a danger to you; that is what makes me feel sometimes that I should never have come."

"There is danger of a sort, certainly, but I don't

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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think it is anything very desperate. We are not in danger of our lives."

"How do you know that?"

Blunt paused before answering. If he were to speak, she would think him superstitious. But why should he be frightened of words? His credulity had become part of inner experience. He had come to know with unflinching conviction that human lives did not exist isolated. He said at length: "You remember the voices in the plantation?" She nodded slightly, without speaking. "The other white men who lived here, they each saw them, in bodily form, a short time before they met death. . . . Well, I went down to look for them this evening, as a sort of test. I wanted to know, and, though they were making a tremendous noise, I could see nothing."

In the look that she gave him there was wonder mingled with fear. "Can you really believe in such things?"

"Yes, in a way I do, else I would not have gone."

She looked away from him and sat motionless as if her fixed gaze pierced through the walls of the room, and saw, far in the distance, something that arrested her attention. Blunt watched her equally motionless; he was trying to guess the riddle of their strangely converging fates.

At length as if returning from long travel, her spirit became less tense. She turned to look at him, smiled and pressed his hand.

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## SECOND IMPACT

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### V

The coast of Korobello stretched calm and silent beneath the stars. In a rendezvous near the village, Pinjaroo and other elders of the tribe met in conclave ; their glances were often turned in the direction of the house. Along a jungle path, Ulotoran, unchecking and noiseless, on her journey to Nathamaki. She was on the well-beaten way which led toward the settlement and the missionary's house.

At Matana Blunt and Eva lay in their separate rooms. Blunt tossed restless on his bed, his mind vainly seeking balance among contending, contradictory forces. Eva, in happy forgetfulness, breathed gently in a deep and dreamless slumber.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### BULL-ROARERS

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#### I

A DAY had passed. It was again evening. The lighted lamp stood on the bare, wooden table. The blinds were drawn. Blunt sat with his back to the window ; Eva was opposite, and Matherson on his right-hand side. The discussion had lasted a long time. Matherson had been talking ; he had told them, with all his simple earnestness, of his profound belief in a providence which governed and directed the ways of man. He had spoken of God's never-failing love, of his infinite wisdom, of the way of faith, of the yielding of the personal will to God's will. And then he had paused. Neither Blunt nor Eva spoke. "Faith," he concluded, "is the well-spring of all action, it is also the sea into which all our efforts ultimately flow." Then he cleared his throat, and, with that delightful absence of humour which Blunt found so lovable, he reverted to the practical man of ordinary sense facing the difficulties of a situation. "What

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## BULL-ROARERS

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do you intend to do about the natives ? " he asked.

Blunt smiled but continued looking at his hands in silence. He had been gazing meditatively at the brown, wrinkled skin, at the veins that branched beneath the surface and at the curious star-shaped and diverging lines about the knuckles. He looked at the white grain of the table upon which they rested and became remotely interested in divergencies caused by a small knot.

Matherson again cleared his throat. " You must surely take a very definite and well-marked line of action."

Blunt looked up and met his eyes ; Matherson was just the same, just the same as he was a month ago, and that seemed strange. His simple steadfastness was not altered. And Blunt could see that the missionary was pleased ; his whole alert being was an expression of well-controlled triumph. It was extraordinary, he thought, that a man should be so limited and so secure. How was it possible ? Blunt turned his eyes away with the feeling that the sight before him was too serenely simple, too triumphantly fatuous to be borne. His friendship for the man forbade him to look any longer. Matherson was such a good fellow, so pleased with the consecration of this marriage that he had planned, so sure of the ground he trod. Blunt looked across the table at Eva. She, in her turn, was looking at her hands, and seemed unconscious of his regard. In contrast to Matherson it was a relief to see the mask

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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which clothed her thoughts. It was a mask that he could pierce . . . partially. Her thoughts were turned inwards. She also presented some appearance of triumph. A subdued joy and exultation burnt like a flame far down. He could only just discern it, for it was hidden amidst the shades of the consciousness of sin. He wondered whether she had heard Matherson's question, and whether to her also it had sounded irrelevant and remote. He wondered at the external serenity of her expression. The prolonged silence, he thought, fitted well that withdrawn candour of meditation. He dreaded lest at any moment Matherson might yet again clear his throat and fling into the silence another question practical and absurd. Blunt turned to him.

"What a man of action you are," he said, "a man of action and of faith."

"I feel my responsibilities, if that is what you mean," said Matherson, who was a little puzzled by Blunt's behaviour. "I should like to feel sure that you fully appreciate yours. You are surely not the sort of man to let things drift."

Blunt smiled and again was silent. To let things drift? Was that what he had done? No, that was not quite the image. Rather he had become entangled in an ever-closing web spun of fine perceptions. He had thought that he was free. For eight years he had been free, but now he was caught and bound. He recalled the events of the morning :

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## BULL-ROARERS

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Matherson's arrival, his long conversation with Eva, his attempt to brush aside her self-reproach and his insistence upon an immediate marriage, his confidence in its success, then the ceremony, which in the presence of Matana had filled him with contradictory emotions, seeming both august and trivial. He smiled as he recalled the dear man's ardour and forethought, the two native witnesses, but lately christianised, that he had brought with him. His thoughts cast back further into the past. Yes, his behaviour was that of a fly caught in a web. He had become entangled and wrapped about by the sophistications of civilised perception. That was the image that fitted. He had made spasmodic efforts to be free, but the web had drawn tighter. Now he was completely wrapped about, was content to lie still. As his thoughts came back out of the past, he saw that Eva and Matherson were both looking at him. "I really haven't yet thought of any plan as regards the natives," he said.

"You think, perhaps, it will be better to see how things develop before adopting a very definite line?" Matherson suggested.

"Yes, that will no doubt be best."

"You think there is any immediate danger?"

"There might be," said Blunt absently, "but nothing to worry about."

Matherson regarded him fixedly for a few seconds, then turned to Eva. "I think, Mrs. Blunt, there is no serious cause for anxiety. I have moved amongst

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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natives of the worst reputation for many years, and have had no violence offered me. Yet," he added, "with natives it is difficult to tell what they are thinking about, and therefore difficult to know what they will do. If there is likelihood of further danger beyond what you have already experienced, your husband should, I think, consider whether he had not better leave Matana and go where the conditions of life are less precarious." He turned towards Blunt. "It is largely your own fault that such conditions have arisen. I trace them directly to your own obstinacy . . . the logical outcome of your own ideas——"

Eva cut him short. "We must stay here," she said.

Matherson turned towards her again. "Are you quite sure of that decision?"

"Yes, quite."

Blunt had looked up with a quickening interest at his wife. "Why do you want to stay?"

"I came here not to spoil your life, to make it so difficult that you are forced to leave the place you have chosen. I came rather to help you. Besides——"

"Yes."

"It would be wrong to go away. It would be running away, not merely from possible physical danger." Her words came sharp and deliberate as though she was embarrassed to let show the excitement that prompted them.

"From what?" Blunt took her up.

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## BULL-ROARERS

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She met his question with the full tide of a serious concentration, but answered falteringly : "From life and more than life."

"From faith?" he suggested with a smile.

"Yes, from faith."

"I understand you, am glad you feel like that," he said. "I feel the same. Either we must conquer Matana or Matana must conquer us."

"That is it." She nodded to him.

He paused, and she saw that his mood was changing, he was again sceptical. "It is not quite so simple as that," he said, "for you know I believe in all the devil-devils, in the Naki, and his enchanted islands."

"That is part of the reason why I must stay."

"Would you conquer him too? Would you reclaim me?"

She did not answer but merely shook her head.

Matherson looked from one to the other. He was puzzled by these people, by the strange interplay of their personalities, and by this marriage that he had been the cause of bringing about. In nine cases out of ten his scheme would have worked, the lonely planter would have married his house-keeper and all would have been well. But Blunt might be the tenth case, or even the hundredth. Eva was also peculiar. He could not be sure what would happen. As he now looked at her refined and sensitive face, he felt with increasing heaviness the weight of his responsibility.

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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### II

Matherson was pacing up and down in his room. He could not quite explain to himself his feelings. Although the noises of the night were very similar to sounds he had often before heard, there was a subtle difference in quality. He was uneasy. There was a faint metallic taste of danger. The fitful moan of bull-roarers rose from the direction of the village ; it was answered from the hills behind the house. He had never before felt so keenly the mystery of that strange music. A sound possessed by a spirit ; like human life it was produced by man, yet was beyond his control. It was a live thing let loose, an elemental spirit set free, constantly recaptured, halting upon one wing, and again released. It spoke a language far simpler than the language of thought. Abruptly it muttered, fell, rose and sighed like the wind. It was like the tides, like the talking of water amongst large stones. One voice answered another across the darkness. The heathen Gods were speaking, and he could well understand how the heathen hearts of their worshippers fluttered in response. His own heart was beating faster than usual. He could not shield himself from the emotions, tense and peculiar, which penetrated into the room. The expressions on the faces of his native boys, as he had bidden them good night, had also been peculiar. An uneasy smile had puckered their foreheads and

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## BULL-ROARERS

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their lips. He had asked if they had seen anything of the tribesmen of Matana. "No nothing." They had shaken their heads. "Best get away soon," one of them had said.

Matherson was not afraid, not even concerned about his safety, but the metallic flavour of danger that he had noticed made him restless. His mind was active. His thoughts reverted to Blunt and Eva. He had heard Blunt enter her room. He heard the mutter of voices, low in conversation. He could hear no words, but could feel in the sounds the tense minglings of attraction and antagonism. He did not need to be very imaginative to apprehend the fateful quality of their conversation.

For a long hour in the morning he had talked with Eva. She had surprised and slightly shocked him by the fervour of her self-abasement, which was equalled and driven deeper and lower by spiritual pride so haughty as to resent the least touch of correction. "She had sinned; she must be punished." That was the burden of her cry. God in His mercy would give her a way of atonement. Matherson was troubled, fearing lest in the purity of her inexperience she should injure both herself and the man she loved. He had spoken to her of human love, of God's blessing upon marriage. "Upon true marriage," she had said, "which comes of purity of spirit." He had tried to hint to her that perfection could not be attained at one leap. She had listened with mute attention, but he had

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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seen that she let his words pass by. A strange exultation had seemed to possess her. Later, at the marriage service, she had seemed to him like a nun taking the vows of eternal chastity.

As Matherson continued to pace up and down, he became afraid of what he had done. Yes, he was afraid of the results of his action. Would God support and justify him? He knelt down beside the bed and prayed.

In the next room the voices had stopped. Blunt opened the door, and closed it again. He was now in the sitting-room. Matherson rose from his knees; he would go to him. He heard the outer door open and close. Matherson stood listening in the silence, which was suddenly broken by the threatening, muttering voice of a bull-roarer swung very near at hand. It rose like the trembling laugh of some demon and died upon a heart-broken wail. In the ensuing silence, he fancied that he could hear whispering, but that could only be a fancy. For a long time he stood listening, then again he knelt down and prayed.

### III

Blunt had closed the door softly, and had walked to where Eva sat near the head of the bed. He stood close to her looking down without speaking. A tremor ran over her body. After a little she looked up at him and said: "No, I cannot."

"Why not?"

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## BULL-ROARERS

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"I cannot. Not yet."

"Do you not love me?"

"Yes, I love you." She paused. "But I——"

"What?"

"I have sinned."

"Now that we are married."

"I know. . . . James, believe me. I love you." She stood now and faced him. "But not yet."

"Not yet. . . . Eva, don't you see that life is slipping from us. Our feet are not firmly planted. How can we face the danger from without, if we lose ourselves in a fog of fancies?"

"No, I cannot," she repeated. "But don't think I don't love you. I would gladly die for you."

"Is it so difficult to live?"

She paused, intently gazing at him, seeking deep in her thoughts for a way out. "If I could give you my body and my soul be absent, I would do so. But I could not. You know I could not."

"Because you love me?"

She nodded but did not speak.

"Eva . . ." He made a gesture to embrace her, but she drew back. "Oh, don't touch me," she cried. "I beg you."

The entreaty in her voice checked him. He stood for a few seconds without speaking, then said simply, "I need you."

The words seemed to her significant with pain.

"Yes. . . ."

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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" You have made it difficult for me to live alone."

She felt despair, as a wave of pity roll over and submerged her. " It would be very easy for me to say : ' Do with me what you wish.' "

Blunt was baffled, thwarted by unintelligent figments, that his brain despised. " Why do you believe in sin ? " he asked.

" I believe in what is real to me."

Blunt shook his head. " You are too pure," he said ironically. Then demanded : " Why did you come here to torment me ? "

" I can't help being what I am," she said in desperation. " You mustn't blame me like that. It is not fair."

" Ideas of fair play are very different. Why," he asked, " have you married me ? "

Her eyes were moist now, though her voice was clear and untrembling : " Can you not believe that I love you." Since he did not speak she continued. " In England I had never met a man anything at all like you, never even imagined a man like you. I thought then that it was only wicked or wilfully stupid people who did not believe in God. I know that you are neither wicked nor stupid, and although now I can understand a little of your point of view, I cannot live in your world." She paused, thinking that he would speak, but he was still silent, watching her closely. She felt his mood was no longer antagonistic, and was encouraged to speak further. " When, yesterday, you spoke of the gulf which divides us,

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## BULL-ROARERS

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I said it only appeared to do so. I believe it is only appearance. . . . I try to believe that ; yet all the values, which all my life I have respected, for you, do not seem to exist. You do not believe even in marriage, though you have consented to the ceremony."

" You also consented to the ceremony."

She did not pause to notice the implication.  
" That was the letter, not the spirit," she said.

" And by that you mean ? "

" We must meet with more freedom, spiritual freedom "; then, as if afraid of her words, fearing lest words in their ambiguity might betray her meaning, she added quickly, " Is it possible to tell me about your faith, about your refusal of Christianity ? "

He pondered in uncertainty. " Yes, I could tell you. . . . It would mean going back a long way, for as long almost as I can remember." He was now grateful that she could turn the sharpness of their conflict. " Sit down and I will tell you," he said.

He went far back into his childhood. He told her how his mind and senses, chiefly his senses, had rebelled against religious and social conventions. How that the current evolutionary doctrines had affected his thought. They had not appeased, but had confirmed his restlessness. He had gone abroad. He told her how, when far from land in the Indian Ocean, he had felt his first touch of freedom ; a freedom different from the mere uplifting of spirit, but something which in the moment took on the

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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quality of eternity. Over the surface of the blue, rolling waters there passed a breath of magic, before whose august beauty had fallen away the weight of centuries of European tradition. The breeze which dimpled and moulded the sea's surface had left the water clear and transparent. "Since then," he concluded, "I have had the same experience in other times and places."

Eva inclined her head slightly. "I understand that," she said, "I have felt something like that, but in a different way. It is very strange . . ." she mused. Then breaking into a new line of thought: "In England, and even on my way out here, I anticipated so different a life. What has happened seems like an impossible exotic dream; or rather, I suppose I had no idea of what life was then; I imagined that it would be far more within my control. I thought then it would be fairly easy to be married to you, whoever you might be. I had a kind of contempt for love, and perhaps for life too, and a kind of arrogant fear. I had no idea of the difficulty of life. When I look back upon myself, I see now how self-centred I was; it seemed to me a small thing then to be able to control my existence. . . . This change in me is rather frightening. . . ."

"Do you think you will lose by it?"

"Not anything of real value. My belief in Christ, my inner knowledge is something that neither you nor any man can make dim." While she was

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## BULL-ROARERS

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speaking, her eyes had wandered from Blunt's face, and had rested upon some object beyond. She now looked back at him, and he could see a conscious pain in her glance. "It is because I have broken His law that I do not dare love you. . . . When I have made recompense, I believe then we may both be forgiven and be blessed with happiness."

As Blunt watched the changing expression of her face, he saw her become radiant with that strange beauty which had appeared to him as unnatural. Though in contradiction to her sex, it was part of her attraction. It was slightly uncanny, mysterious. He could well understand how the natives, quick to observe the slightest facial expression, believed her to be possessed of supernatural power. How could he answer that strange and fervid quality? This was no case for argument, being beyond the limits of reason and common sense.

The sound of bull-roarers broke upon the silence. As they listened to the rising, falling cadences the expressions on their faces changed.

"That is a terrible sound, inexpressibly wild. I don't think I shall ever get accustomed to that; it makes me afraid that I shall never get accustomed to the life here." She had seemed to shrink together and become physically smaller.

"Do you think you will want to change it?" he asked.

"Yes, I shall want to."

"And I shall want it to remain always and

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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eternally what it is." He stood up clenching his hands. "I could never let you change it."

Suddenly all his latent antagonism blazed up. It was she who denied life. She was held by the old deadly, death-thirsting religion that he had fought against and struggled free from. - She feared and denied the all-claiming, passionate symbolism of being. He felt oppressively the confined limitations of the room. She had denied him ; he would remain no longer. He turned quickly towards the door.

Eva did not move from her seat though a strong impulse urged her to call out, to run to him, to fling her arms about him and lead him back. She needed desperately to feel his presence and support, to be in contact with him.

Clenching her hands so that her nails bit into her palms, she sat still and silent. The door closed ; for a few moments she could hear him in the outer room ; then the outer door opened and closed.

From very near at hand rose the threatening, mocking voice of a bull-roarer. She jumped to her feet. It was the voice of some heathen God calling him to destruction. She stood tense with apprehension. In the ensuing silence she could hear the beatings of her heart. With a wild movement she turned towards the crucifix on the wall. With moist eyes and fast-beating pulses she regarded that effigy of divine suffering. Her lips moved inaudibly.

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## BULL-ROARERS

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### IV

A waning moon had risen late over the inland hills ; clouds were drifting across the sky, but clear spaces showed deep and star-filled between. Blunt walked quickly out into the night. He had not gone many paces when a figure rose up in his path confronting him.

Uloto had carefully oiled and scented her body, her hair was braided with heavy, red hybiscus flowers. She stood silent yet questioning in his path.

" What is it you want ? " Blunt demanded with irritation.

" I have come to speak with you. I have been waiting."

" Well, what is it ? "

" Is it to-morrow that the white woman leaves for Nathamaki ? "

" She does not go to Nathamaki, but will remain here. I have changed my mind. She will remain with me."

" Tarfia has changed his mind." Her words sounded toneless and without expression.

" Yes." After a pause he asked : ' Did you repeat my message to the tribe ? '

" Word for word as you spoke it to me."

" Well ? "

Uloto frowned but did not answer.

" What did they say ? "

" They say that you are bewitched by the white

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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woman. When she has gone they will consider what they will do."

Blunt frowned in his turn. All day he had been so occupied with the situation between himself and Eva, that he had quite forgotten Uloto, and had given little thought to the natives. "Tell the chiefs," he said, "that they must meet me by the first copra-shed, when the sun stands above the black rock to-morrow; say that I wish to speak to them." He spoke with a confidence that he did not feel.

"And what is to become of me?" asked Uloto, stepping nearer to him.

"You must take Koro-Koro as your man, and when your eldest son is born I will give him presents so that—— Ah! is that it, you little fool?" He had seen the knife glitter and caught her arm as it fell.

She struggled against him in silence, but he twisted her wrist back compelling her to drop the knife. "You damned little fool," he muttered. "And now you can tell them this." He was angry at his sudden danger, regardless of what he said. "Tell them that no weapons will kill me; I am proof against spear and steel; and tell them that unless they obey my commands I will hunt them with all the devils in Matana."

He had his foot on the knife, but he had to shake the girl fiercely to prevent her from biting. With a half twist, half wrench, he had spun her round

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## BULL-ROARERS

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and flung her away. She staggered to regain her footing, stood panting for a moment, then fled swiftly down the path without looking back.

For a few seconds he felt the exultation kindled by danger, but soon there followed reaction. In the house all was still. He could see, under the blinds, thin streaks of lamp-light. In the jungle there was also profound stillness, the bull-roarers were no longer calling to one another. He turned from the path, clambered a short distance up the hill, and lay down near a small open space among the bushes. For a while he looked up at the moving clouds, at the moonlit surface of trees, at dark shadows among glistening foliage, and at the stars. His mood changed ; he became filled with a high-stretching, deep-sounding, all-embracing consciousness of peace. He dozed and woke looking at the stars and the moving clouds, then settling himself more comfortably upon the strong-scented earth, he slept.

The first glimmer of dawn was in the east when he woke. The sky was still dark, and the trees and bushes dull grey against shadows of neutral-tint. A distant bull-roarer, somewhere down in the plantation, was faintly audible. No other life seemed to be stirring yet, as the light imperceptibly increased, every leaf and blade of grass seemed vivid with consciousness of the coming day. Blunt lay still enjoying the cool air of dawn. In a short while he became aware of movements among the bushes. He lay back so as to be concealed in the undergrowth,

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## SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

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and saw emerge out into the open space, but a few paces from him, a male savage fully painted and adorned for magic ritual. The man looked round, seemed satisfied and took up his position where the undergrowth grew most sparsely. His body was painted shining black with a mixture of soot and oil. On his legs were ochreous streaks, and on his forehead and ribs were lines of the same pigment. There were red marks under his eyes and mouth, and red slashes upon each shoulder. Streaks of dead white clay underlined each of the red markings. In his hand he carried a bull-roarer. Blunt watched, interested in his movements. He planted his feet firmly and stood tense, listening. For a long time he appeared motionless.

From far away a muttering voice broke the silence. Another and another, nearer and nearer. Blunt smiled to himself ; these people were using all their magic to drive him out. But as these tremulous voices gathered, his smile died. This was indeed a worthy magic to withstand. The man in the clearing swung the wood gently ; planting his feet wide apart, he gripped firmly the string ; then, contorting his face, and putting out all his strength, whirled the wood in a narrowing, expanding cone above his head. The sound broke forth like the flutter of great wings. It lifted to a cry, was stifled, sank, and moaned. Again it rose like a shout, it failed and sank, plaintive and broken. The expression of the man's face followed its modulations. Blunt saw the beads of sweat

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## BULL-ROARERS

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break out through the paint and oil. He watched the play of muscles beneath the shining skin. That fierce, exalted credulity, that fervour of belief touched and thrilled him. Yet he did not fear that magic ; it was too close to the wild secret of his own heart. In the strong scents of the earth, in the cloud-swept sky, and in the crude reality of sex he had found the same mystery. This was the symbolism of life ; it was religion.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### ABRACADABRA

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**T**WENTY or thirty men were sitting in a roughly shaped crescent. Uloto, very excited at the notice she was receiving, stood in their midst. She was speaking rapidly, making gestures with hands and body. Her audience followed her words in wrapt attention. Now and then a man let loose a low exclamation.

“ Two days since, as I told you, I spoke with Tarfia. I gave you his message ; he promised that the white woman should depart to Nathamaki never to return. But I, fearing that the magic of the white she-devil might be too strong for him, waited and watched to see what would happen when the white medicine-man came from Nathamaki. It was as I had feared ; soon after he had come, they all went together into the inner room, and there, together with the white medicine-man, the woman made a strong magic. I watched with my face to the window, and listened.

“ The white medicine-man puts on a strange, black

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## ABRACADABRA

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and white garment which he has brought with him. Tarfia and the she-devil stand in front of him, and for a long while mutter together magic words. The two men from Nathamaki stand by and mutter sometimes also. The white medicine man does not speak as is usual among white men, but his voice goes very low calling up devils, then rising in a song through the nose. After a while Tarfia goes out. He sits down on the verandah and lights his pipe. It is now easier for me to look through the window ; I do not fear Tarfia seeing me ; he has turned his back. The she-devil and the medicine man remain together, they eat and drink muttering as at the sacred ceremonies, but wickedly, making very strong magic. I was frightened, my blood became as water and I came away."

" Since that time have you spoken to Tarfia ? " asked one of the men.

" Yes, this morning I went to speak to Tarfia. He told me that the white she-devil would remain. Then, because he had spoken false to me, I drew my knife, but its edge was blunt against the magic that they had made. It fell from my grasp. He told me to go quickly and deliver his words to you."

The men leant forward, listening attentively.

Uloto now spoke slow and clear, repeating each word as it had been spoken. " ' Tell them,' he said, ' that no weapons will kill me. I am proof against spear and steel. Tell the chiefs that they must meet me by the first copra-shed, when the sun stands

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above the black rock. Say that I wish to speak with them, and that if they do not obey me, I will hunt them with all the devils of Matana.'"

Low murmurs broke from the men. "Wurru, wurru, wurru," some of them said, and slapped their thighs.

"Did he speak those words?" asked Pinjaroo after a silence.

"As I have spoken."

Pinjaroo got laboriously to his feet. He was stiff and lame from the lash. He turned towards the men, and asked sarcastically, "How long shall we, who are many, and to whom the land belongs, bend our necks beneath the power of a stranger? Have we forgotten the strength of our fathers? Has our blood turned to water? Shall we ask the women to instruct us, or shall we go as servants to the men of Nathamaki? Have we no young men who can run swiftly and strike hard?"

A dozen men leapt to their feet; others followed an instant later.

"Do you fear the white folk?" he asked of a man who stood nearest.

"I fear no man; but thou, Pinjaroo, know that the bravest will draw back before a strong magic. Even your own spear was turned aside."

Pinjaroo paused, frowning. "It is true," he said, "that the power of the white she-devil is very strong, and that our weapons are turned aside; but, listen to what I speak and shall advise."

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A messenger came running through the scrub and entered the circle. "The white medicine-man is even now leaving for Nathamaki."

Pinjaroo's face contorted, like a taut bladder tapped by a stick. "He must not return alive," he said in a low-pitched, intense voice. "When he is slain, then perhaps the white woman will lose her power. The people of Nathamaki, who have grown tame and cowardly, will be our slaves to do with what we wish." There was silence while he looked stolidly at the eager faces. "They will be defenceless, and their women will be ours." Suddenly a man shouted and a tremor went through them all.

Pinjaroo raised his hand, and they were again tense and silent. "Five of you," Pinjaroo indicated the men, "go, wait by the deep watercourse in the third ravine. Return swiftly and bring with you tokens of your success."

The men had bunched together into a little knot separate from the others. They spat upon their hands, slapped their thighs and breasts, and made curious explosive sounds with their lips, "Ppft, ppft, ppft," then, grouping together even more closely, made their way silently into the forest.

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## CHAPTER XV

### APOTHEOSIS

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#### I

B LUNT and Matherson stood a little apart talking together, while Matherson's two native boys waited holding the horses. "I dare say you heard me go out last night," Blunt said, and as he spoke looked searchingly at the surrounding hills and jungle for any sign of native activity.

Matherson nodded. "Yes, I was awake a good deal," he said.

"The natives are excited. You heard their bull-roarers? Well, there's some kind of mischief up; I think they imagine that they can frighten me away. I don't think there is any very pressing danger," he looked now hard at Matherson, "but if I were you, I should take the less direct path over the hills."

"What do you mean by that?"

Blunt hesitated, then said: "The people here have never been very friendly towards Nathamaki,

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and you yourself have been accepted chiefly as my friend. . . . My friendship, from their point of view, may not now be quite so valuable. Of course it may be unnecessary, but I don't feel easy, now that I can't see them. They get frightened at nothing, like children ; but instead of crying, they begin to throw spears."

Matherson smiled and shook his head. " It is too late for me to begin taking precautions. If I were to, I should always be making detours. . . . But, if there is really such danger, and I confess I don't like the feel of it, ought you and your wife to remain ? "

The silence with which Blunt met this question marked its irrelevance. He again looked away over the jungle, and said, after a pause. " Last night I sent a messenger, one I can trust to deliver what I say, to tell the chiefs that they are to meet me this morning. I shall put things to the test." He smiled assuringly. " They need things explaining ; I should have talked with them earlier. . . . I have known them so many years. My prestige will carry me through. They trust and even fear my word. . . ." He left the end of his thought unfinished, but continued : " I have talked with Eva, and she is determined on staying, and facing it out."

" I should like to stay with you till I know how things are shaping."

Blunt shook his head. " It's an odd business we

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have brought about ; we are all three obstinate people, and, I suppose, each must work out his own salvation. . . . I had much better meet these fellows alone ; you couldn't be of any help to me. I have managed them in the past, and in a little shall know just how we stand. Things will work themselves out," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Get back safe to Nathamaki, and take my advice : take the hill path. If once these fellows get to throwing spears, one never knows where it will stop. There is a very good chance of——"

For some moments Matherson had been watching him closely ; he now broke in, "Now that you have a white woman here with you, I don't like leaving you alone."

"I see why it is you have never married," said Blunt with gentle mockery. "No, I cannot run away ; besides, we probably exaggerate. Why should we be stampeded by the swinging of a few bull-roarers and the hokus-pokus magic of an old bone? . . . I'm tired, that's what it is. I didn't sleep much last night."

Matherson looked earnestly at his friend. "I shall send runners to see that all goes well with you." Then, after a pause, "When you have things again under control, you must come and visit me. Your wife, I am sure, will like Nathamaki ; she will be interested too in the work I am doing."

Eva came out of the house and joined the two men. They talked hopefully of future meetings,

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and in the cool morning air it was not difficult to believe in the easy continuance of life and order. Matherson bade them good-bye; the two men gripped hands, and, as their eyes met, knew that their friendship, in spite of contradictions, was sure and firmly cemented.

"Take the inland path; it's more picturesque," Blunt shouted after him. Matherson turned in his saddle, laughed and nodded.

### II

The morning mist was still hanging amongst the tree-tops when Blunt and Eva turned back towards the house. The silence of the awakening day seemed to emphasise their loneliness. The disharmony and incompleteness of their union now assumed larger proportions. It was like a cloud before Blunt's eyes, a cloud which weighed upon his spirit. The relationship with his wife was as vague and immaterial as the mist among the tree-tops, and, like the mist, possessed a cold, remote beauty. In the future he could read neither hope nor meaning.

He looked at the sun which was climbing rapidly. The first waft of the day's sultriness became perceptible. "In half an hour I am going down to the plantation to meet the men," he said. "I have sent a message telling them to meet me; I must get things settled once and for all."

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" I must come with you. I must meet them also," she said.

" I had better see them alone."

" No, I must come with you." She took his arm and made him turn towards her. " *I must* meet them too ; it is our separation that makes us afraid of each other. You know I wanted at first to get to know them. I feel sure that would have been best." Blunt frowned without answering. " Now I must get to know them," she continued with desperate eagerness. " *I must* or the strain will kill me."

Blunt reflected. There was probably truth in her contention. If, on her first arrival, he could have brought her into simple and direct touch with the natives, could have shown her to them in a light which they would have understood, all might have gone well. At the time there had seemed insurmountable objections to such a line of action. Those objections could scarcely be said to have grown less. . . . It mattered little either way, he concluded. " Very well, you can come with me."

She laid a hand on his shoulder. He could feel elements in her being which, like wild birds in some glass-house, beat against invisible restraint. In himself also, he was aware of lack of freedom, of the cramping tension of imprisonment. Not only the alien magic of Matana and constraining bonds of common inheritance held them entangled ; other more subtle fibres of the soul were stretched to the music

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of hitherto unknown winds, bending from plane to plane in contradiction.

He turned away abruptly, feeling the hopelessness of words or even actions. Yet his mind was clearer. He was glad that she would come. Thus far, at least, were they more united.

As they walked, first along narrow jungle-paths and later through open spaces of tall grass, Blunt knew, with that unerring prescience which tells of danger, that they were being watched ; yet they saw no sign of human life.

The first copra-house stood in a small clearing. It was rather larger than any of the other copra-sheds on the estate. It was the one-time mission-house that Matherson had hoped to establish. Now it was filled with rank, sweet-smelling copra waiting the time when it should be loaded and taken to Tomanta. Blunt and Eva walked down the small clearing ; there was still no sign of a native. Intentionally he had come a little late for the appointment. It would not add to his dignity to be kept waiting. They paused beside the house, and Blunt could feel the power of unseen eyes closely watching their least actions. He stood for a few moments motionless in front of the door, gazing intently into the bushes. He made an easy target for a spear.

"They are not coming into the open, damn them," he muttered. Then to Eva : "I was half afraid they might not turn up. They are thoroughly

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scared at something ; they dare not even strike at us, for they could have killed us at any moment had they been so minded."

She looked at him with wide-eyed excitement but without words.

"This silence is a bit uncanny. . . . Can you feel that they are watching us from all round ? It's wonderful how silently they can move, like shadows.

Her eyes became brighter ; she nodded but did not speak.

Blunt made a movement to go further ; he resented these unseen eyes which seemed to follow even his thoughts with such unfailing attention. "Come, there is no reason to tempt their spears, though probably we are safe enough. I shall make a round of the plantation, perhaps later on they may show themselves. There is nothing else particular that we can do," he added ; "we are as safe in one place as another."

She walked obedient beside him. They passed through narrow, overgrown paths and across open spaces, yet saw no sign of the human life which they felt to be about them on all sides. They passed by the copra-sheds, by the long drying-screens, by the piles of heaped nuts, and by large mounds of fibre and broken shuck. All seemed still and deserted. They did not speak much, but as they went from place to place, always conscious of those following eyes, imagining that they could see swift-

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moving and always disappearing shapes, their new fellowship in danger touched their hearts to a strange intimacy. It was a sweet feeling. The jarring music of high notes was giving place to a low-pitched harmony. As time progressed and their passage remained unobstructed, the present danger and the uncertainty of the future grew always more remote, at last fluttering only upon the outskirts of consciousness.

They came to the seaward border of the plantation; and as they walked side by side under the high-arching palms, their conscious thoughts were content to become more and more passive, while the spirit of eternal quiet enmeshed them in delicate, invisible bonds. After the excitement to which their hearts had so contrarily beaten, a strange numbness had fallen upon them. Systole and dystole moved harmoniously with the calm, deep-hidden pulses of the sea, with the hushed stirring of giant leaves and the advancing splendour of the tropical noon.

"Let us go down to the edge of the sea," said Eva.

They left the plantation, and walked over the brilliant white sand down to where the green water, in little advancing and retreating waves, washed a line of pink and yellow shells, shells which lay in fringing festoons, marking the sea's advance along the coral beach. They walked upon the harder sand, close in the break of the waves, till they

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came to where coral boulders met olivine and basalt, and where high rocks shut them off from inland jungle or plantation.

"Here at last we are alone," said the woman with a low sigh.

The words broke upon Blunt's mood incongruously. It was strange. What did she want with him alone? He remembered that at one time he would have known how to take that cue, but now only a passive interest fluttered where once had been desire and volition. What strange opiate had numbed him? Was it merely that he was tired? He did not believe that was an adequate answer. Perhaps this trance-like mood was provoked by the blazing sunlight and the mild clemency of the sea.

They rested under the shade of an upstanding crag of rock. Yes, they were alone, no longer watched by hidden and malignant eyes. And what now remained for them to do? Blunt could form no plan of action. A strange meekness, warm as fresh milk, flowed about him from unknown sources of mystery and quiet. He no longer craved for the contact of her touch, but was content to sit happy, like a child, in his mild dream. For the first time of his remembrance he was not aware of contradictory emotions. And Eva? She perhaps was in the same mood. She did not speak to him any more, but was gazing at the sea. He watched the low undulations flow and fade into one another. He tried to follow one line of advancing water as it

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approached the beach, but could not be sure whether the waves truly advanced, or whether only the glistening surface bent and stretched in rhythmical, repetitional movement.

In this mood, so negative in sensation and thought they were carried far from the conflict of living, and, outcasts though they were upon a foreign shore, were lifted upon serene tranquillity. It was their privilege to touch the mystery of their own hearts, and feel the peace which flows beneath the contradictory manifestations of life.

For how long they remained in their solitude by the sea's edge they did not know. Hours passed unreckoned, but, as the sun flashed reflections of its descending brightness into their eyes, they awoke.

They stood up, cramped from their long vigil. They stretched and laughed at each other's awkward movements, and, at the sound of their laughter, they knew how much alone they were, and how much united. Eva held out her hand to him. Blunt took it simply, and, like children, they walked back, hand in hand, along the beach together.

### III

The semicircular disk of the sun's orb, a burning blend of vermillion and lake, poised on the horizon. The chord grew shorter each moment, defining a smaller arc. At last a solitary clot of light, deformed and twisted by refraction, alone remained. It

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trembled in the vaporous air and disappeared. The man and woman on the beach were watching the last of its light. They stood at the edge of the plantation between the palm-trees and the sea.

"Let us get back quick before it is dark," Blunt said. "Those fellows may have changed their minds, and left some message for me." He gave a look back across the sea, then turned on to the well-worn path that led to Matana.

Hardly they had entered the plantation when the voices were upon them. They did not hear anything of a warning approach, of a rush through the tree-tops. That wild cacophony was precipitated from the thin air immediately above. Scream answered yell in quick sequence. They gripped each other's hands and pressed close together. Then in a flash the figures had become visible, horrible, incredibly horrible. . . . They were there, then gone. They were there again, unmistakably materialised. "Upside down among the tree-tops hanging by their feet," that was what he had been told. Yes, and he had always imagined that the lesser one would have a raw, pale face and protruding teeth that met together in a half-circle. As they swung to and fro, they uttered hoarse imprecations.

Blunt's instinctive action had been to protect his companion. He had his arms round her, holding her close. He was aware of her white face, terrified and mute.

Now she was whispering to him. What was she

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saying? No, no, that was nonsense. He gripped her tighter. "Let me go, James; let me go," she repeated. She was struggling with him; the demons yelled in derision. . . . She had got one arm free; now he saw what she was doing. She pulled out the silver cross from under her blouse. She held it up against those elemental powers of evil. He loosed his hold, and drew back, looking with admiration at the white fervour of her face.

There was silence; the tree-tops were untenanted. They were alone.

He drew a deep breath. "That was bravely done," he said.

She swayed, but he caught her before she fell. She stood rigid against him, trembling. Her teeth chattered. Blunt guessed how near breaking point she was. He must get her past it. "Hold up the cross," he said, "Your magic is stronger than theirs. Hold it up. . . . Now pull yourself together, that's right. . . . We must get out of this." He was no longer the child but the man. He forced himself to laugh. "Devilish unpleasant neighbours!" He hardly knew what he said. But he must help her, and help himself too. They must get away, back to the house. "That's right; you can walk now."

Blunt had his arm round her, guiding her course. Thus they walked for a few paces. "That's right. That's splendid," he said. "Hold up the cross that will put the fear of God into them." Then suddenly he knew that she had come back to her

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own control, that she was mistress of her senses. She stood still as if puzzled, and looked at him.

"But you don't believe," she said.

"Yes I do." She was silent, and he was tempted to leave it at that; but this was too important, not to be lied about. "No, I don't, not as you do. I believe your magic is better than theirs, but neither of them is ultimate."

Her eyes were fixed on him, and, as he looked, they filled with tears. He could see that he had hurt something deep within her soul. He could see, too, what he had not seen before—the consciousness of a personal love. "Come, we must get out of this," he said, feeling abashed, "back to the house. To-morrow we will set out for Nathamaki." He took her arm and led her quickly along the path. She walked at his side without speaking, now and then she trembled. She had let the cross slip from her hand; it hung exposed upon her bosom.

Once free of the plantation, a mutual impulse made them pause and look back. Blunt was surprised at her complete recovery of self-control, and, now that she was again her own mistress, he felt that she had drawn further away. She was pondering something in her mind.

"Do you believe in the tradition about those . . . the tradition you told me of?"

"Yes, in a way. In a superstitious sort of way I half believe in it. It's a curious coincidence. . . After all, death is a solution to a difficult problem.

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This morning, when I saw that my boat was gone, I thought our case might be a hard one."

She was not to be put off. "Do you really believe in their power?" she repeated.

"No, not really, and I should like to do them down."

"You don't believe we shall live?"

"Very well, no, I don't."

She came closer and said with a ring of enthusiasm, it was almost exultation, "Then we must die together."

He turned away, feeling a twinge of annoyance. What a recognition of failure those words contained, what compromise. He was antagonistic towards this Christian love of death; it would have been a better, harder thing to have lived. "We shall not have much choice," he replied dryly.

Only for that short while by the sea had they been in complete harmony; now that they had returned to life, were close to death, discords divided them. The easy, feminine acceptance of death as a solution of life's failures, as something that would make amends, was an insult to the volitions and desires of life. And though he had seen love in her eyes, it was thickly veiled, withdrawn from his grasp. . . . Yet, as the twilight gathered, it was his own vitality that failed. It was so easy to become indifferent, regardless.

At the copra-house he received more certain confirmation of his fate. Upon the centre pole of the

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building Matherson's severed head had been rudely stuck. On either side were the heads of the two converts he had brought with him from Nathamaki. In the half-light they had been unaware of what they were approaching; the three dark objects had been indistinguishable, and the stains upon the white wood beneath had appeared as puzzling shadows.

Blunt took a step back, catching sharply at his breath. The first stab of that sight was like fire, but was quickly followed by ice on forehead and spine. Then he was steadied. There was something very simple, far removed from heroics or extravagance, in the humility of those heads. Matherson's face was much as he had known it in life. The grey moustache drooped over the mouth without concealing its smile of gentle confidence. The eyes were closed, yet that reposefulness did not hide undeviating integrity, a loyalty to an unquestioned ideal. The face told very clearly its own story. As the man had lived, so he had died. Blunt felt a pang of envy. The image of death, even though thus mutilated, was in no wise horrible. In his friend's face there still lived beauty and courage.

He felt Eva's hand upon his arm; the touch was at first gentle, but grew to a firm pressure. He turned and met her eyes brimmed with tears. He was glad that he could see there no horror, only pity and admiration. "It is well said that we should call no man happy till he is dead." Then, after a pause :

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"It seems a simple business, yet 'tis a big change for so short a time."

She inclined her head, standing close to him holding his arm. "He was very fond of you, James."

Blunt smiled absently, oblivious to the implication.

"I was fond of him too." Then, shaking his head : "I hope he's gone to the heaven he believed in."

"He's all right," she smiled through her tears.

Blunt nodded and turned away. "Look at the two poor devils he brought with him."

The faces of the two men from Nathamaki were not so happily composed in death as that of their leader. One man's face had been caught and congealed in a look of extreme fear ; the other, with mouth open and tongue and eye-balls bulging, expressed an incongruous surprise. Their souls had been caught unaware. Blunt shook his head. "Poor devils, I hope *they* have found the heaven he promised them."

Eva did not speak, but seemed communing with her own thoughts. After a long pause, Blunt made a slight, irritable movement and gave a rapid glance round the small clearing. "Can you *feel* the power of all the eyes that are watching us ? "

"Yes." Then, looking round resolutely ; "Why don't they kill us ? "

"I can think of no reason, lest perhaps they are afraid." Blunt was surprised at the tone of his

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own words. Why was he so indifferent to life and death? Was it because there was so little hope? He hardly thought that a sufficient reason.

He looked again at the remnant of what had once been Matherson, at the tired yet reposeful face. "He was a good friend," he said slowly. He turned toward Eva, who had shaken the tears from her eyes. She was watching him palely and intently, her hope of late-awakening, passionate love ready to sweep fear and all else to oblivion. The tired smile and the slight shifting of his shoulders was expressive of a scepticism as profound as death itself.

### IV

Though they had gone fasting, they did not think of preparing a meal. The sense of relaxation, together with the quality of painful intensity, which found its being, almost its consummation in the forest silence, numbed also their senses. They had no hunger, only a parching thirst. The familiarity of household things seemed strange. Blunt lit the lamp and pulled down the blinds. It was a relief to shut the door upon the eyes which had watched and followed. Once more they were alone. Could he not again feel at one with this woman whom surely he loved, and whose fate was inexorably bound with his own? No. They were distant, far distant apart. She stood withdrawn, wrapped in her own thoughts; but, as he looked at her, he

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could perceive that clear, fine-edged quality, at once poignant and soft, which all his life he had subconsciously known would be possessed by the woman that he should love. His heart beat more quickly as he watched that fine quality which suggested at once detachment and deep absorption. She was his wife, not merely by ceremony, but by her own giving ; yet how far distant did she remain ! An impulse stirred him. Might not the gulf be bridged ? But his wounded pride held back ; twice had he been denied ; she was too far entangled midst the intricate threads of a life-despising religion.

She looked at him and smiled.

It was a graceful, enchanting movement, yet he hardened his heart. It would have been simpler had they been killed without this respite. For what purpose had they been allowed to regain the house ? He gave his thoughts words, not able to endure the gentle significance of that smile. "I never thought we should reach here alive," he said.

"And now, what is to be done ?" the shadow of her smile still lay on her face.

Perversity mingled with, and perhaps born of physical tiredness made him reply : "Nothing."

She seated herself, her eyes widely open, half watchful, half meditative.

Blunt was annoyed with himself and with the strength of his perversity. "We can sit here and listen," he said.

She inclined her head, and looked down at her own

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hands. He was remorseful now, but obstinacy kept him silent.

For a long while they sat listening, listening to the faintest of sounds. They became mesmerised by the stillness and by the evasive, undistinguished passage of time. . . . At last, far away, somewhere on the border-land of eternity, yet very near at hand, there was a sound. There were other sounds, gentle yet unmistakable. The blood beat hot at the backs of their throats. They looked at each other ; there could be no doubt, the house was surrounded. The sounds became louder, more reckless ; things were being dragged against the walls ; faint whispering was discernible. Yet, as if hypnotised indeed, they listened in apathetic speculation. Had the magic of forces, mysterious and unlimited, invaded their small ace of foothold ?

Bushes and undergrowth were being placed under the walls, against the door and beneath the windows. The man and woman sat listening, looking at each other.

There was the faint crackling of dry wood in a flame.

Blunt found his voice. "They are going to burn us," he whispered, but he did not move from his seat.

Eva stood up. "God has answered my prayer," she said. "But is it my fault . . . ? Is it my fault that you are to die ? I would gladly meet death ten times if I could save you."

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"What prayer?"

She came near to him before she spoke, but he could see that her thoughts were turned inward.  
"I am allowed a way of atonement."

"Oh, that! . . . Are you then satisfied?"  
He was at once ashamed of his sarcasm.

"Not yet," she said, "but now I can tell you," she spoke tremblingly, as if afraid of her words, "that I love you with all my body and soul—with all that I am."

He stood up bewildered. He was suddenly awake from a long swoon of indifference. She did not need to speak further, his arms were about her, and she met his embrace with the full rapture of her dearly-bought freedom.

They were called back into time by the cracking of the glass in the windows. The reed blind blazed like gunpowder, and dense smoke poured into the room. "You love me like that," he said, "then nothing matters." He spoke loud and clearly. "You'll see I'll beat these fellows. What they want is a master . . . that's all." He unclasped her arms and ran towards the door.

"Oh, stay," she called to him. "Stay with me."

"It's all right," he shouted. "Be ready to follow me."

He flung open the outer door. In front of it brushwood was piled breast-high. On one side small flames crackled. Blunt vaulted on to the top

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of the pile. He stood for a moment brightly illumined by the burning house.

"Away with you, damn you. Where's Pinjaroo ?

For answer a spear struck him in the throat. A moment later two others pierced him. He fell back choking. Three natives rushed the pile. Pinjaroo had his enemy beneath him. Twice his long knife went home, once at the throat, once to the heart.

For a moment, Eva saw a tumble of bodies outlined by fire-light, then the door slammed and she was left alone. She heard the exultant cry of a savage, but no other voice. The roar of the blazing wooden house was in her ears ; smoke filled the room.

He was killed, and she could not speak to him ; never tell again her love. Ah ! the pain of human love was too terrible to be borne. It had filled her, overflowed. Its flame was all-consuming. She was alone, alone, and these other flames, less cruel but relentless, were closing upon her. Should not her love return again to God ? She knelt down. "Jesus accept, accept this sacrifice. . . . Thy will be done. . . . Thy will be done. . . ." Then, with words which seemed blasphemous to the lips, but which sprang from the heart's true inspiration, she whispered : "In the sacrifice, God is identified with the sacrifice. God *is* the sacrifice, for ever and ever, amen."

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The sun and rain still fall with primordial inno-

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cence on the shores of Korobello. Pinjaroo, with all piety of spirit, rules savagely a savage people. Civilisation has been driven back. It watches grudgingly from Tomanta, greedy of lost riches. Among the palm-trees of Matana, the spirit voices still move, screaming to one another.

THE END.

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